0 1755 0073 2763
HELEN-JEAN MOORE LIBRARY
POINT PARK COLLEGE

FRANTISEK LANGER

# THE CAMEL THROUGH THE NEEDLE'S EYE

A THEATRE GUILD PLAY

PG
5038
.L3
V42

Langer

The camel through the needle's eye

DATE LOANED | BORROWER'S NAME

PG
5038
.L3
V42

Langer

The camel through the needle's eye

Point Park College ID required for check-out.

POINT PARK COLLEGE LIBRARY

PITTSBURGH PLAYHOUSE
222 CRAFT AVE.
PITTSBURGH, - PA.

# *The Camel Through The Needle's Eye*

A THEATRE GUILD PLAY

# *The Camel Through the Needle's Eye*

A COMEDY IN THREE ACTS

BY

*Frantisek Langer*

ADAPTED BY

*Phillip Moeller*

892 L25C
PG
5038
.L3
V42



*New York* · BRENTANO'S · *Mcmxxix*

POINT PARK COLLEGE LIBRARY

*Copyright 1929 by the Theatre Guild, Inc. Manufactured in the United States of America by the Vail-Ballou Press, Binghamton, New York.*

*This play in its printed form is designed for the reading public only. All dramatic rights in it are fully protected by copyrights, both in the United States and Great Britain, and no public or private performance—professional or amateur—may be given without the written permission of The Theatre Guild and the payment of royalty. As the courts have also ruled that the public reading of a play for pay or where tickets are sold constitutes a performance, no such reading may be given except under the conditions above stated. Anyone disregarding the author's rights renders himself liable to prosecution. Communications should be sent to the Theatre Guild, Inc., 245 West 52nd St., New York City.*

*THE CAMEL THROUGH THE NEEDLE'S EYE*
*was presented by the Theatre Guild for the first time in New York City on April 15, 1929, at the Martin Beck Theatre, with the following cast:*

CHARACTERS

| | |
|---|---|
| *Mrs. Pesta* | HELEN WESTLEY |
| *Pesta* | HENRY TRAVERS |
| *Street Urchin* | NORMAN WILLIAMS |
| *Susi* | MIRIAM HOPKINS |
| *Counselor Andrejs* | JOSEPH KILGOUR |
| *Director Bezchyba* | MORRIS CARNOVSKY |
| *Marta Bojok* | CATHERINE CALHOUN-DOUCET |
| *Alik Vilim* | ELLIOT CABOT |
| *Servant* | PERCY WARAM |
| *Lilli Bojok* | MARY KENNEDY |
| *Joseph Vilim* | CLAUDE RAINS |
| *A Medical Student* | GEORGE FREEDLEY |
| *Servant Girl* | ROSE BURDICK |

## Act One

*Cellar near Strahovskenadgasse, Prague. Afternoon.*

## Act Two

*Alik's apartment. Three months later. Morning.*

## Act Three

*Prague's Model Dairy. Three months later. Morning.*

*The Theatre Guild, an organization for the production of plays of artistic merit, is solely directed by its Board of Managers which selects its plays and artists, controls its policies, and is constituted as follows:*

Theresa Helburn — Philip Moeller — Maurice Wertheim
Lawrence Langner — Lee Simonson — Helen Westley

Theresa Helburn, *Executive Director* — Philip Moeller, *Producing Director* — Lawrence Langner, Maurice Wertheim, *Directors of Organization*
Warren P. Munsell, *Business Manager*

Kate Drain Lawson, *Technical Director*
Cheryl Crawford, *Assistant in Casting*
Anita Block, *Reader of Foreign Plays*
Harold Clurman, *Reader of English Plays*
Courtenay Lemon, *Advisory Reader*
Robert Sisk, *Press Representative*
Mark Barron, *Assistant Press Representative*
Addie Williams, *Subscription Secretary*
Lucille Luttrell, *Traveling Subscription Secretary*
Charles A. Riegelman, *Counsel*

# *Act One*

## *ACT ONE*

SCENE: *Cellar residence of the Pesta family. On the rear wall near the ceiling, an alley window, only the upper half of which is above street level. The right-hand wall of the room is broken by a rectangle where steps lead into the cellar from the street. On the left wall is a washstand with bowl and pitcher on it. Against the left upstage wall are two packing cases with blankets and pillows on it, this forms* PESTA'S *bed. This left wall forms a closet the door of which opens directly opposite the entrance from the street. There is a stove in the right wall, downstage. In front of the window is a box with a few blankets and pillows for* SUSI'S *bed. Small table center downstage with chair slightly downstage and left of it, stool right. Wash-bowl on stool right center with stool right of it. The only other furniture is a bench extreme left.*

MRS. PESTA

[*At washtub—washing.*] I'll have to open the window a bit. [*Climbs on bench—hangs large underdrawers on line at window.*]

PESTA

Do you think that's gonna help my rheumatism?

MRS. PESTA

[*Takes shirt from line.*] It'll be much worse for your rheumatism if you put these on while they're wet. Can't you stop talkin' about it? It's been the curse of my life for fifteen years. [PESTA *mumbles.*] Besides, if you want to know the truth, I've never believed in it, anyway!

PESTA

Well, maybe you don't believe in it, but just the same you make a livin' out of it.

MRS. PESTA

[*Gets iron from stove, coming forward, irons at table.*] Everybody has to turn an honest penny the best way they can. Don't I scrub the floor every other day so this place will look as neat as the homes of the honest poor always do in novels? Don't I whine just in the right way when somebody comes to do us good? And what do you do? Nothing! All you have to do is to stand in the crowd at the corner, and the minute you see some well-dressed people coming along—I mean really well-dressed people—all *you*'ve got to do is to fall down. [*Bangs the iron on the table.*]

PESTA

[*Lugubriously.*] I know—I know.

MRS. PESTA

And then, of course, anybody with any kind of a heart at all—and there's still some good-hearted people

left in Prague, thank God! now that the Austrians have gone back to Vienna— [*Spits on iron.*] Why, they'll pick you up, and then you'll beg them to take you home because you're a poor cripple and can't walk.

PESTA

I know—I know—

MRS. PESTA

Wasn't the whole thing a great idea of mine? Didn't it work the very first time we tried it? Why when they brought you home yesterday didn't I squeeze a few kronen out of their charitable hearts? And you call that work! Yesterday we got 20 kronen like that, and today we may get 50—

PESTA

Yes, but some day a policeman may do the pickin' up and then—

MRS. PESTA

There isn't goin' to be any *then,* if you use both your eyes—one to fall down in a fit with if the people are really swells, and the other not to fall down at all with if the police are in sight. [*Shakes iron at him.*] I never did like policemen, anyhow!

PESTA

All right, but please close the window now!

MRS. PESTA

[*Puts iron on stove.*] Just a minute! Wait—wait—. When the cabbage isn't on, I like a bit of fresh air even

though I do live in a cellar. And there won't be the proper kind of poverty here until it's cold. And since all that's so—and it is so, isn't it?

PESTA

[MRS. PESTA *puts flannel in wash-stand.*] Yes, it's so —it's so—

MRS. PESTA

Well, all right, then. If it's so, we're not hurting anybody if every now and then we trim a few millionaires. That's your part of the job. What are you a sick man for, if not to keep us alive?

A BOY

[*Appears at the window.*] Say, Mrs. Pesta—the lady on the third floor says she'll give you ten kreuzer if you and Susi'll take some bags to the Wilson station for the Vienna express—

MRS. PESTA

[*Goes to window.*] All right—all right! [*The* BOY *leaves,* MRS. PESTA *crosses back to bed.*] The third floor wants me and Susi to take two bags to the station. That's the kind of errands I like to run. [*Sits on stool right edge of bed.*]

PESTA

Well, just the same I don't like what you're makin' me do. I don't want to get intimate with no policemen.

MRS. PESTA

But you don't do anything against the law. All you do is ask the good kind people to help you home.

PESTA

Yes, but what about my honor?

MRS. PESTA

Your honor! Honor is all right to talk about at political meetings, but you've got to earn your living.

PESTA

I know, but I don't like to do it this way. It was much nicer when the charitable organizations used to leave the money at the door.

[*Both shake heads.*]

MRS. PESTA

There are six charitable organizations in Prague, and we've had all we're goin' to get out of five of them. And the sixth is too grand to bother about *us*. They're so swell, they've actually got leather upholstery in the office, and the stenographers are a bad lot, why they wear silk stockings—all of them—and the lady President gives her daughter a million for a dowry. And when they give something to the poor, they give you at least a hundred.

PESTA

Well—why can't we belong to them? We're deservin', ain't we?

MRS. PESTA

Sure, but we're not their kind of charity.

[PESTA *sits up.*]

PESTA

Couldn't you kinda manage them somehow?

MRS. PESTA

No. [PESTA *lies down again—says "oh."*] They only help the widows and orphans of former rich men. I'm not sayin' that that would stop me. Isn't my daughter the orphan of a rich father? And ain't I so to speak his widow? But there's a bad hitch in it.

PESTA

I know. There's a bad hitch in everything.

MRS. PESTA

They'd want to make me fill out a long list of questions and you can just bet I'm not goin' to put anything in writin'.

PESTA

I'd even write the Bible over for a hundred kronen.

MRS. PESTA

[*Gets mop from left corner of room and mops floor.*] But if it hadn't been for the questions, I'd have given 'em more than they were lookin' for. I'd have shown 'em such poverty here that it would have been a positive pleasure. I've earned a living out of five of them, and

I've earned it honest. I can show them more real poverty to the square inch than anybody else in Prague, and I do it my own way—[*Puts broom down.*] no beggin' and no yowlin'. The way I do it has character and hits 'em straight in the eye. [*Picks up pot.*] I'd hit 'em over the head if it was necessary! [*She takes the cover from the pot.*]

PESTA

Look out! Don't spill the cabbage!

MRS. PESTA

I ain't going to spill it. This is old cabbage, that'll have to be warmed over.

PESTA

What do you want warmed-over cabbage for?

MRS. PESTA

I guess I know what I'm doin'. There's nothin' smells so much like need as warmed-over cabbage. That's the sort of poverty that hits them straight in the nose. That's legitimate poverty. [*Puts pot back, crosses to him.*] Hurry up, now! It's almost five o'clock. Everybody will be out now on Strahovskenadgasse. [*Crosses to him, hustles him out.*] You'll have to shake a leg, even if you are an invalid!

PESTA

All right, all right. But the old way was best. I could do my work then by staying in bed.

[*She crosses down stage left to wash-stand, rinses out cloth—she turns—sees him.*]

MRS. PESTA

So that's it! You don't want to get up! That's it, eh? [*Pulls him up by collar.*]

PESTA

I don't like it, I tell you. I feel like a regular Jack-the-Ripper, luring people into his den. [*Starts to sit—she shoves him up and off.*]

MRS. PESTA

Hurry, I tell you!

PESTA

[*Starting off toward door.*] Oh, all right! You're the master-mind. [*Stops center.*]

MRS. PESTA

[*Shoving* PESTA *across to door while speaking.*] As if I didn't know it! It takes a master-mind to think about the warmed-over cabbage! It came to me last night in bed. I'm always thinkin' how we are goin' to get on, and I've decided I'm goin' to do it even if I've got to depend on vegetables. You'd like to do it your way and be happy, wouldn't you? Well, I can't live on your happiness. I tell you, your sickness is going to keep us well! Hustle along, now! [*She shoves him off, closes door and goes left—He starts off, comes back, grumbling—coughs. She turns, flabbergasted at seeing him.*]

PESTA

Can't I wait till it's a little darker?

MRS. PESTA

[*She comes tearing at him.*] No. Now! Susi'll be back by then, and I don't want her in on this. I hide all I can from her. This sort of thing mightn't be good for a young girl. One thing more, Pesta.

PESTA

What's biting you now?

MRS. PESTA

Don't forget that they'll ask you—

PESTA

Oh, all right! I know what I got to say as well as I know my own name— [*He begins to act the part.* MRS. PESTA *enjoys performance.*] "Thanks, good, kind people, I've been an epileptic for four years, and God help me, but I can't do any work." . . . Then I begin to cough— [*He gives a sample.*]

MRS. PESTA

Now, don't start that! That only appeals to the health organizations. It's in their charter that they've got to support people who cough. But nice, ordinary, respectable people have got to bring you home before they start thinking about it. Just groan, and groan, and keep on

groanin'. If they ask you any questions, you don't want to answer.

PESTA

I wish *you* could do it, and not me!

MRS. PESTA

I suppose you do—but who'd be here—to manage the finishing touch?

PESTA

Touch! Sure. I know what you mean. [*He goes out. When he is half way up the steps he begins to spit.*]

MRS. PESTA

Pesta, Pesta, don't forget, none of your spitting. Don't spit, they'll think it's contagious.

PESTA

All right—all right! [*Exits.*]

[MRS. PESTA *puts another shirt from tub on line, starts to make bed, sees a bottle, takes it out, sees there is some in it, puts it back, smiles;* BOY *comes running in.*]

BOY

Mrs. Pesta, Mrs. Pesta, the lady on the third floor says you better hurry or you'll miss the train, and she says if you come right away she'll give you some coffee.

MRS. PESTA

I'll send Susi as soon as she comes back. How's your baby sister?

BOY

How do I know, she ain't no baby, she's too little yet. Where's Tow-head? [*Runs out to window.*] Will you tell me when Susi comes back?

MRS. PESTA

Yeh, I'll tell you.

BOY

[*Outside.*] Hello, Susi, tell me what happened to the soldier.

SUSI

I can't now, not to-day, I haven't time to tell you a story, some other time.

[*A moment later* SUSI *enters.*]

MRS. PESTA

How'd you get back so soon?

SUSI

I answered the ad and they didn't have anything for me, so I just came home. [*Puts hat in closet, comes forward between table and bed, sits on stool right end of bed.*] Where's Pesta?

MRS. PESTA

He's—I took him in to talk with the janitor. He's in there now. They like to talk about old times.

SUSI

It's cold in here, Mother.

MRS. PESTA

Is it? Well, if it is, go out and take a walk. It's warmer in the streets than in here.

SUSI

But I don't want to.

MRS. PESTA

[*Goes to her, pinches her cheek.*] Schnucksy, are you hungry?

SUSI

I could eat something. Got anything?

MRS. PESTA

[*Sits on chair near table.*] They've got some coffee for me up on the third floor. If you go up, they'll give you some.

SUSI

I'll take the pot up with me, and they'll probably give me enough for the both of us.

MRS. PESTA

Hurry up—hurry up—

[SUSI *rises, stops at center.*]

SUSI

Say, mother. What's all the hurry?

MRS. PESTA

Say, what's the matter with you? Do you want me to hand you an engraved invitation? Hurry up.

SUSI

Look here— Aren't you up to something?

MRS. PESTA

Is that the tone to use to a mother? You think you can say anything you want, don't you, just because I let you pay part of the expenses when you were earning something!

SUSI

[*At stove takes pot.*] I don't mind helping when I've got a job.

MRS. PESTA

Of course, you don't! That's what any decent daughter would do. Hurry up! Get along, now, will you!

[SUSI *exits.* MRS. PESTA *goes to bed, fixes pillows, then to stove, takes cabbage pot—to fill air with it—holds it at arm's length—blows fumes into air—hears voices—puts pot on oven—stays there—the door opens;* PESTA *is carried in bodily by* BEZCHYBA *and* ANDREJS. MRS. PESTA *acts very surprised.*]

ANDREJS

You can bang your head to pieces before you get down those stairs.

MRS. PESTA

Holy Saints! Gentlemen—on the bed there— is he dead! [ANDREJS *and* BEZCHYBA *attempt to reassure* MRS. PESTA *as they come in.* PESTA *quivers in a fit.*] Poor man. Poor man.

LADY

[*Enters, comes to center.*] How can you let that poor man out on the streets alone? He can hardly drag himself along.

MRS. PESTA

I just can't keep him home. It's awful, but when he's home he just lays there chewing his misery. God help us, that's all we've got to chew. I ought to go out with him, I suppose, but, begging your pardon, Ma'am, I can't! I've got to stay home here, if you can call it a home, and try to make a living. I've been supporting all of us for the past three months. My daughter has no work and my husband is a cripple.

LADY

Poor man— What is the matter with him? [*She steps to* PESTA.]

PESTA

Lots, Ma'am—[LADY *goes further away, two men rush to right center.*] but it's all mixed up with rheumatism. I've been a rheumatic for four years. And God

help me, can't even lift my little finger. [*Lifts it.*] Much as I'd like to work.

BEZCHYBA

Let's go, shall we? The air here is a bit heavy.

ANDREJS

It smells of . . . poverty here.

LADY

What can you expect of poor people? But the place is as clean as it can be under the circumstances.

MRS. PESTA

Yes, my mother—God keep her close to his knees—always taught me, cleanliness is next to godliness.

PESTA

If it weren't for cleanliness I'd have been in heaven long ago.

ANDREJS

Let's go—Let's go.

[*Men start off.*]

LADY

Gentlemen, wait, please!

[*Men stop.*]

ANDREJS

Don't let's stay here any longer than we have to.

[*Men start out,* PESTA *groans, coughs, they stop.*]

MRS. PESTA

[*Leaps to his aid.*] Poor old man!

LADY

Why don't you apply to some charity if things are going so badly for you? [PESTA *has a fit.*] Do apply. [*Motions* MRS. PESTA *down with her finger.*] I myself am a directress of the Society of Good Friends. Of course, we couldn't give you anything because we only support the widows and orphans of formerly well-to-do men. They are the poorest of all.

MRS. PESTA

I know that out of my own experience.

[ANDREJS *goes right—sits on bench, after he has dusted it with silk handkerchief. Takes out gold cigarette case, smokes, offers one to* BEZCHYBA, *who takes out monocle and looks place over, goes to arch of stairway.*]

LADY

You? Maybe we could make an exception in your case and you *could* get some help from our society.

PESTA

Would they bring it to the door?

MRS. PESTA

[*Motioning* LADY *to sit on bench beside her.*] It's a hard story to tell. You see, I'm half a widow of a rich man, and my daughter is half his orphan.

[BEZCHYBA *comes to center.*]

LADY

Half an orphan? [*To* BEZCHYBA.] How am I to understand that? [*As* BEZCHYBA *clears his throat, starts off, gesture of not understanding. Crosses to center.*] Bezchyba, this may be a personal concern of mine.

BEZCHYBA

[*Crosses to* ANDREJS.] Of course, of course.

ANDREJS

What did I tell you, Bezchyba? We've got to stay.

MRS. PESTA

Well, it was like this. I was acquainted with a rich young man and nature had its way if you know what I mean, Ma'am—the friendship was not . . . fruitless . . . and . . .

LADY

What became of him? Did the young man die?

MRS. PESTA

If that were all! But he married, settled with me for nothing and then died on me.

LADY

You say he was a rich young man? There, there you see, my instincts were right.

ANDREJS

I told you we'd have to stay, there's nothing we can do.

LADY

Then we could help you. Have you proofs of his fatherhood?

MRS. PESTA

Isn't my daughter proof enough? She's his walking image. She's got his looks but, thank God, my brains.

LADY

What is his name?

MRS. PESTA

I don't ever want to speak of him again.

LADY

But, my dear good woman, we need at least his name to be sure that he came of a well-to-do family.

MRS. PESTA

Can't you see he came of a fine family after the way he treated me. The better they are, the worse they are. Begging your pardon, Ma'am, but it just fits like pork and beans. When they are teachers or lawyers, there's sometimes a little money for the child. When they are clerks or laborers, there's usually a wedding—but when

they are gentlemen, there's only the baby—and you're left in the lurch.

BEZCHYBA

There's no answering logic like that.

ANDREJS

Obviously, obviously.

BEZCHYBA

The only thing to do is to believe her. [*They both laugh.*]

LADY

But first, we fill out the questionnaire.

[MRS. PESTA *starts.* PESTA *groans.*]

MRS. PESTA

Pesta! Pesta!

LADY

[*Rises, comes to the two men.*] It's hideous, unbelievable, unbelievable.

MRS. PESTA

[*Crestfallen, sits down on bench left.*] Questionnaire!

LADY

I always carry one in my bag . . . my bag . . . Alik has it. Where is that boy?

ANDREJS

He's just outside the window.

LADY

Call him in for me, please.

BEZCHYBA

[*Calling through window.*] Alik, Alik.

LADY

This won't do without a questionnaire.

ANDREJS

Do what you think best.

LADY

It needs handling, it needs handling. [*To* BEZCHYBA.] You remember, we once gave some people money they used the next day to go to Karlstein for a picnic—and in a taxi. Would you believe it?

[ALIK *enters, and stands at door facing right smoking a cigarette.*]

ANDREJS

Oh, Alik.

MRS. PESTA

[*To* LADY.] Your son, Ma'am?

LADY

[*After* ALIK *goes to door.*] My son, no . . . my . . .

MRS. PESTA

I understand, Ma'am . . .

LADY

What do you understand?

MRS. PESTA

Excuse me, Ma'am. You mean he is to be . . . your son-in-law.

LADY

Of course. But how did you know? [*Crossing slowly to* MRS. PESTA.]

MRS. PESTA

As soon as you said you belonged to the Good Friends, Ma'am, it came to me right away. Everybody knows about the Society. It's a famous society.

LADY

But how did you know about my daughter?

MRS. PESTA

From the Narodni Bolitika, Ma'am. We always read the papers, Ma'am—especially the society columns. We always read about the grand balls, fancy funerals, and what the ladies wear.

LADY

But why?

PESTA

We've got to have some romance in life—

MRS. PESTA

Yes, Pesta. [PESTA *coughs.* LADY *backs away.*] It's all right, Ma'am. Sometimes he almost coughs his feet off, but it ain't contagious.

LADY

Alik, Alik, give me the little purse. [ALIK *goes to the middle of the room and bows to* MRS. PESTA. *She bows grotesquely.*] Now we will fill out the questionnaire.

[ALIK *starts fast for door, again as* LADY *goes to bench left.*]

BEZCHYBA

[*To* ALIK.] Alik! Come back here. If we can stay, you can too.

[ALIK *slowly drifts to stove.*]

MRS. PESTA

It's hard for *me* to write, but my daughter writes like print. What a little hand she's got! Natural in a mixture of two classes of society, my husband says.

BEZCHYBA

[*Back of table.*] Is that an advantage?

MRS. PESTA

Hasn't the gentleman noticed that? Illegitimate children always get along better. It's as if the fathers put more into them. I know that from experience. They're stingier with their own.

BEZCHYBA

An interesting observation. There is something to it. Obviously one can't be quite as enthusiastic about a thing like that when it's legal.

LADY

Sit down, gentlemen, and we'll fill this out. Come now, my good woman, sit down and answer my questions.

[BEZCHYBA *at table,* ALIK *sits on tub,* ANDREJS *on bench at right.*]

ANDREJS

It is a quarter of five.

LADY

We'll be through in time to get to the Royal to hear him play the Sarasate. [*Begins humming.* ALIK *lifts cover from cabbage pot.*] Alik, Lilli will be waiting there for us.

[*The smell of the cabbage evinces exclamations from* BEZCHYBA *and* ANDREJS.]

LADY

And!

MRS. PESTA

I don't know, Ma'am.

LADY

But?

ANDREJS

[*Rises—to center.*] I can't stand it in here. I'll never pick up anyone again from the pavement.

BEZCHYBA

I'm not amused either.

MRS. PESTA
I don't know, Ma'am.

ANDREJS
It is boring.
[ALIK *yawns.*]

LADY
But, my good woman, you must answer some of my questions. If you want me to help you.

MRS. PESTA
Forty-one. And my husband's fifty-nine.

[ANDREJS *is on third step, sees* SUSI *and backs into room.* MRS. PESTA *speaks quietly to the* LADY, *but explicitly, and every now and then we hear louder snatches.* PESTA *lies motionless on the bed, the gentlemen are bored. The door opens and* SUSI *enters.*]

SUSI
Mother, Mother, I— [*She bows to each one in turn, rather embarrassed, but her appearance arouses the visitor's interest.*] Mother—
[PESTA *groans loudly.*]

MRS. PESTA
Susi, poor old Pesta no sooner went out—when he got sick in the street and these good kind people brought him home.

[PESTA *groans through this speech.*]

SUSI
But, Mother—I thought you said that—



*Setting by Lee Simonson*

*Photo by Vandamm*

A SCENE FROM ACT ONE

MRS. PESTA

Never mind. Did you find a job?

SUSI

No, but I got the coffee. [*Bowing to* LADY, *crosses left of table, puts coffee on it, bows and returns right.*]

MRS. PESTA

[*To the* LADY.] From the good kind folks on the third floor. That's all we get to eat. And it's been like this a long time.

LADY

Haven't I seen you somewhere, girl?

SUSI

I don't know, Ma'am.

MRS. PESTA

How could you, Madam.

*Together*

LADY

She reminds me of someone I know. [*Rises.*] Well, this will be sufficient, thank you. Now, gentlemen, we must be going. Little girl, will you call a taxi for us?

[SUSI *to door to show them out. As* LADY *crosses* PESTA *signals* MRS. PESTA.]

MRS. PESTA

[*Motions her back to bench.*] Just a minute, Madam.

I could tell you a few things about your friends they don't dare print in the papers.

LADY

What do you know about my friends?

BEZCHYBA

[*To* SUSI, *going up steps.*] Just a moment, little girl, we're not going yet. [SUSI *comes down between the two men, in front of staircase.* LADY *and* MRS. PESTA *sit on bench stage left, and gossip. To* SUSI.] I hear you're out of work.

SUSI

It's fourteen days now, sir.

BEZCHYBA

What is your trade?

SUSI

I was in a chocolate factory.

ANDREJS

A sweet profession, eh?

SUSI

You know I used to like chocolate so much when I was a child. That's why I went into the factory when I was fourteen.

ANDREJS

And there you ate too much.

SUSI

Worse than that. I got the smell of it. On the streets people would sniff me when I passed as if I were a walking candy-store. Lots of them licked their lips when they met me.

PESTA

Susi, Susi, that's no way to talk.

ANDREJS

Perhaps she thinks it was the chocolate?

SUSI

I used to think that a chocolate factory was the grandest thing in the world.

BEZCHYBA

And what seems the grandest thing in the world now?

SUSI

Maybe it's something that will be just as disappointing when I get it.

MRS. PESTA

[*Forced whisper.*] It was all her fault.

LADY

[*Thrilled in anticipation, gets closer to* MRS. PESTA.] I'll be through in a second, gentlemen. Yes, yes.

BEZCHYBA

Oh, we're in absolutely no hurry.

[ALIK *gazes fixedly at* SUSI.]

ANDREJS

Don't hurry on our account.

SUSI

[*Smiles at him gaily.*] Who is that gentleman?

ANDREJS

The son of Vilim the financier. A wooden-headed young gazelle.

[ALIK *squirms,* ANDREJS *back to her.*]

BEZCHYBA

[*At* ALIK.] But a good boy. He can't help the way his father brought him up.

ANDREJS

That lady there is marrying him to her daughter. She's frightfully rich too.

BEZCHYBA

Yes, you see,—[*Whispers.*]

MRS. PESTA

It was a fourteen-pound baby. At first they thought it was at least twins.

BEZCHYBA

What kind of work would you prefer?

SUSI

I have no choice. But I'd like something that I've got to do all myself from start to finish. Something that's nothing when I begin but something when I'm through. That kind of work would interest me.

ANDREJS

Yes, my dear.

[BEZCHYBA *slighted, turns and wanders toward gossiping ladies.* MRS. PESTA *whispers into* LADY'S *ear.* LADY *scandalized and delighted.*]

MRS. PESTA

He was a musician, Ma'am, not a poet—you can't expect a fourteen-pound baby out of a poet. [*They chat in low tones and* SUSI *and* ALIK *smile at each other again.*]

BEZCHYBA

[*Crossing to her.*] Your mother seems to know a good deal.

SUSI

[*Beaming at him.*] Yes, she knows too much to have to live like this.

ANDREJS

And your mother's daughter doesn't seem to be exactly a fool either.

SUSI

Thank you, sir, but Mother doesn't agree with you although she's never said so. She never talks about me. She won't let anyone else talk about me either. [*The two men close in on her, she steps forward.*] After all, there's nothing anyone could say. [*Comes to tub.*]

LADY

I feel that I have heard enough. Gentlemen, we'll be going.

[SUSI *goes to door, as if to show them out. The two men are talking left of door.* SUSI *in doorway.* ALIK *remains standing extreme right.* LADY *rises.* PESTA *signals to* MRS. PESTA *by cough.*]

MRS. PESTA

Yes, Madam, but—

LADY

Just a moment, Madam. Alik, [*he doesn't hear*] Alik, write me out a check for 100 kronen, or lay out the cash for me. [MRS. PESTA *by-play with* PESTA.] It's quicker . . . and simpler. You can't expect the lower classes to understand anything as complicated as a check.

[ALIK *gives her a bank-note of* 100 *kronen.*]

MRS. PESTA

Thank you very much, Madam.

PESTA

God will bless you, Madam.

LADY

Not me, I'm only an instrument of good—you must thank our society. And now let us be on our way to the Royal, gentlemen.

BEZCHYBA

[*Crosses to* SUSI.] I'm going to find some sort of work for you.

SUSI

[*Bows politely.*] I'm not afraid of any kind of work, Mr.—?

BEZCHYBA

Director Bezchyba.

SUSI

[*Very much impressed.*] Mr. Director.

[BEZCHYBA *goes.*]

ANDREJS

No. I won't forget either.

[SUSI *bows.* ANDREJS *goes.*]

LADY

[*Crosses to door—turns.*] Lilli must be waiting there for us already, Alik. [*To* SUSI.] Will you show me to the nearest taxi-stand? [*Walks to door.*]

MRS. PESTA

[*Wanting them all out of the house.*] I'll show you, Ma'am, if you'll let me. I'll get a taxi for you, Ma'am.

LADY

Please do. [*To* ALIK.] You'll join us at the taxi, won't you?

[*While the company prepares to leave,* ALIK, *still rooted to the spot, pulls a pad and a fountain pen out of his pocket and writes something.* SUSI *looks at him in astonishment, then goes to stove and arranges utensils.* ALIK *stops writing. Sticks the pen and pad back into his pocket after tearing off the top sheet, and hands* PESTA *a bank-note, crossing to left of* PESTA.]

ALIK

For you.

PESTA

Oh no, sir, I couldn't take it. [*Looks around room.*] All right if you insist. . . . It'll pay for my funeral. At least that day I'll know life's worth living.

ALIK

But! [*Puts his finger on his lips.*]

PESTA

Oh it's all right sir, I don't misunderstand.

ALIK

Please! [*Steps up to* SUSI, *smiles at her. She smiles back, and he reaches her the note he has written.*]

SUSI

No! No! [*Thinking it money. He shows her it is a letter—She takes it with—"Oh!" Reads:*] "Forgive me for writing what perhaps I should say, but I've never bothered talking very much. May I see you? Perhaps today? I would call for you so that you might be my valued companion for an hour." You want us to go for a walk together? [ALIK *nods affirmatively.*] I don't know . . . mother's awfully strict with me.

PESTA

[*Puffing cigar.*] I'm a poor old cripple—I *hear* nothing . . . I *see* nothing. [*Turns to the wall.*]

SUSI

[*Crossing to* PESTA.] What do you mean, Pesta? There's nothing wrong about this.

PESTA

Susi! Susi! Tz-tz-tz—

SUSI

I want you to understand from the beginning the sort of girl I am.

ALIK

[*Two steps to her.*] Oh yes—I do. [*She waits for him to continue—looks up at him, sees he can't speak.*]

SUSI

Maybe we could go to a cinema . . . not a big one, though. I haven't a nice dress, and I don't want people laughing at you. [ALIK *folds his hands as if to make little of her last words.*] I'm only joking. I have a waist and a skirt that's still pretty new. I'll go . . . But . . . [ALIK *looks at her inquiringly.*] You were supposed to go to the Hotel Royal. That lady's daughter is waiting for you. [ALIK *bursts into laughter.*] Then you can get away all right? Well, then you can come and get me.

ALIK

When?

SUSI

Whenever you like. It'd better be early, so that I'm home again by dark. It'll be easier to smooth down mother, then. I don't want her to think . . . But what if she does . . . I can be just as stubborn as she when I want to be. I don't want you to misunderstand me, but a girl like me has to look out for herself. Just the same you can come for me.

ALIK

Good!

SUSI

But I'll meet you at the corner if you'll be ashamed to

be seen coming out of a cellar with me. [ALIK *shakes his head "No!"*] Well, see you later then. You will come, won't you? [*Gives him her hand.* ALIK *kisses it tenderly and politely, then bows before* PESTA *and withdraws, puts hat on, takes it off again just as he leaves. She holds her hand out till he's gone—looks after him—then at her hand. She stands by chair center.*] Pesta . . . did you see?

PESTA

I told you I was blind and deaf.

SUSI

[*Crosses to box at foot of* PESTA's *bed.*] He kissed my hand.

PESTA

You gotta expect that kind of thing from people what's got manners. Don't say nothing to your mother about that fifty he give me.

SUSI

I gave him my hand and he kissed it. No one's ever done that to me before, Pesta. [*Sits.*] I didn't believe that sort of thing could ever happen to me. [*Looks at her hand.*] Did you think he was stupid; the fat one said he was. I didn't.

PESTA

Susi, go slow!

SUSI

That was an awful nice letter he wrote to me. He said he wanted me to be his companion for an hour.

PESTA

Say, don't let your mother see that letter and don't you tell her what he said.

SUSI

He didn't say very much but what he did say said an awful lot.

PESTA

All he said to me was this. [*Shows money.*] He's what you call a persuasive talker.

[MRS. PESTA *off stage.*]

MRS. PESTA

Good afternoon, Mrs. Schmultzheim.

SUSI

[*Hears* MRS. PESTA.] Here comes mother. I'd better change my clothes before she can say anything. [*Goes into closet.*]

[MRS. PESTA *enters.*]

MRS. PESTA

[*Crosses to left of* PESTA.] Pesta, I'm going to bring you a prize today. I'm going to buy you a whole bottle. [*She sits on box at foot of bed.*]

PESTA

Yeh? Well I ought to pin a medal on you too. My ears almost fell off listening to you.

MRS. PESTA

Well, I knew they weren't any of these stingy war profiteers. That's why I piled it on a bit for them. And all I told the lady was the newest dirt in her neighborhood. That's how I got the money. I'll have to get change for this bill and go over to the grocer later, quick, and buy supper. I can't take him the whole bill . . . he has thirty kronen coming to him. Where's Susi?

SUSI

Here I am.

MRS. PESTA

What are you doing in there?

SUSI

I'm putting on my waist and skirt.

MRS. PESTA

What for?

SUSI

I'm going for a walk.

MRS. PESTA

You don't have to dress up elegant to go for a walk, do you?

SUSI

Someone's calling for me.

MRS. PESTA

What? [PESTA *coughs.*] Who?

SUSI

Someone I just met.

MRS. PESTA

[*Looks at* PESTA *who coughs.*] Ah—ha! His sort aren't for you.

SUSI

He is a very handsome polite young man.

PESTA

He was polite enough to give me a kreuzer without kissing it good-bye.

MRS. PESTA

Is Susi your daughter or mine?

PESTA

You can't blame me for her.

MRS. PESTA

And that's why I'm the one that lays down the law and says: "No foolishness."

SUSI

[*Already dressed, comes out of closet back of table,*

*brings cloth.*] What do you mean by foolishness? What's the harm in my going out walking with a young man who knows how to appreciate me?

MRS. PESTA

You?

SUSI

Yes, me.

MRS. PESTA

He'll appreciate you all right. He'll talk you into anything.

SUSI

Why, he hardly said a word. Just the same we're going out for a long walk.

MRS. PESTA

If you don't play with fire, you won't get burnt. And your mother knows what she's talking about. I was only a smouldering cinder when he left me with 200 kronen—and a baby. I've had experience.

PESTA

And Susi's the proof of it.

MRS. PESTA

Did I say she wasn't? That's why I'm warning her.

SUSI

[*Sits by table—cleaning shoes.*] But, Mother dear, I'm smarter than you are.

MRS. PESTA

[*Sits left of table.*] There, that's just what I thought at the time. And if anybody had told me different I'd have laughed him out of the house. But maybe you will be able to take care of yourself because when you were a tiny thing and I came home from work at night, no matter how tired I was you always knew how to feed yourself and I said to myself then, that child knows how to grab a hold of life. But she's going to have it better than me, and her children'll have it easier than she does. That's why I take such good care of you.

PESTA

You ought to write that down for her, old lady, so she can sing it.

MRS. PESTA

Don't you laugh at me, you don't know what it is to have a child.

PESTA

Maybe I don't, but I've got rheumatism. [*Goes on mumbling.*]

SUSI

[*Rises, sits on table.*] Mother, you don't have to worry about me. I'll go to the cinema with him and maybe we'll have a sandwich and a glass of beer.

PESTA

What's that?—Beware of beer! [*Keeps mumbling.*]

MRS. PESTA

Shut up, Pesta—I guess my daughter can hold a glass or two.

SUSI

Then he'll take me right home. Oh, mummy, I'll feel so proud walking down the Graben-Ulitze with him. Every girl that passes will say, "Where did she find him?" I'll bet you they'll envy me. You know, Mother, what I like about him—he's so shy and daring, both at the same time.

MRS. PESTA

[SUSI *begins sewing button on her sleeve.*] Susi! Susi—there's something you mustn't forget—even the palest looking men probably have blood in their veins. Don't I know! Mine might have been a lily, but just the same the first time he met me he took me to a beer garden. Yes, and afterwards we heard the singers at Lotka's Cafe. You got to be careful about music too—many a girl's gone bad on a good tune. Afterwards he took me home, and I said a real good-bye to him, just outside the Jewish Cemetery. It was nearly midnight, then we walked some more and under the trees in front of the church, he said good-bye again, then he squeezed my hand, and the first thing I knew, even though I was saying to myself I wouldn't say it, I was saying to him that I would see him the next Sunday. The street was empty, as if somebody had just swept it; only the moon was shining over the Krenovsky House and a coachman sleeping on his hansom cab in front of the

courthouse; and so, we went one more Sunday, to Thoma's, and the next Sunday to the Black Inn. And that Monday I didn't go back to my job, because my pale young man seemed to be getting less pale and the first thing you know he rented me a house in Florence Street and that very morning I was out buying myself a silk dress. [*Grins.*]

SUSI

And you see you like to remember it.

MRS. PESTA

I wasn't very smart then. You'll go to a beer garden with him today and some Monday you won't be coming home either. Mark my words. I'm talking sense.

PESTA

[*Whispers over his shoulder.*] Aw, shut up—she's too young to know what you mean.

MRS. PESTA

Well, as young as she is she better remember what happened to me.

SUSI

It doesn't make any difference what happened to you . . . you have something to remember.

MRS. PESTA

I have to remember what came next too.

PESTA

I came next.

MRS. PESTA

Yes, God help me. [*To* SUSI.] If your father were alive we wouldn't be living like this. When you were born he gave me two hundred for you and I thought in those days I was a millionaire. Now I've got nothing and he has the grandest grave in the whole Wolschan Cemetery. A marble mausoleum with a gold fence around him and a stone lady crying over him. A lot of good her crying does me. Yes, a lot of good. Some day Pesta and me'll take some sandwiches and we'll take you out to see it.

PESTA

Sausage sandwiches? That'll be nice.

SUSI

Yes, I'd like that.

MRS. PESTA

But I don't know why you ought to be interested when all he left you is your yellow hair.

SUSI

Didn't his family help you?

MRS. PESTA

There's where I found out how smart rich men are with poor girls. They made it pretty hard for me. His

family wanted something in writing. All I had was a postcard from the rascal with "Salutations from Pilsen" printed on it. And I had to agree with them that there wasn't anything in that. You see! I'll chew my shoes—

PESTA

I wouldn't do that if I were you.

MRS. PESTA

If he wasn't real fond of me, and yet he slipped away from me, slick as you please, even before he was in his mausoleum. That's why I say men like him aren't for you. [*Somewhat elegant.*] So his sweet words and his curly hair came high, very high; him leaving me nothing but you.

SUSI

You always think the worst is going to happen. I only think of his nice clothes, a little walk and a good time.

MRS. PESTA

Stick to men in your own class or a little higher. You ought to be tickled to death if you get a man with a nice little garbage business or a wood and coal stand who wants to marry you. That's what I call sensible.

PESTA

Susi, write it all down, so you can learn it by heart.

MRS. PESTA

Don't gabble. No, he won't bring you any joy, or if

he does, only for a little while and you'll have to pay for it all your life. [*Rises.*] I've talked myself into a terrible appetite, and not a thing in the house for supper.

PESTA

All right then, you go to the grocer, and don't forget what you promised me.

MRS. PESTA

I'm not forgetting you brought in a real gold mine today. Susi, remember what I told you and don't you be up to any foolishness. I'm your mother and remember these hands were made for something beside plucking violets. [*Goes to cupboard, gets filet for groceries, exits.*]

PESTA

[SUSI *goes to window then to door watching for* ALIK.] I laugh when your mother talks, but you do what she says. She's very smart, and she only burned her fingers once, as far as I know; when she took me to give me a career and it turned into the gout. But she knows how to use me even this way. You listen to your mother, and if you'll take my advice . . .

SUSI

[*At door.*] What?

PESTA

Take that cabbage right off the stove. Business hours are over. Why should that noble innocent young

man come back here again to smell warmed-over cabbage?

SUSI

[*Goes to stove, puts pot away.*] You're right, Pesta—if he comes back at all.

PESTA

Susi—Susi—

SUSI

What—what—

PESTA

Come here and I'll tell you—

SUSI

What is it you want?

PESTA

I don't want to be yelling. I don't go in for a lot of fancy talk like your mother—but from what I saw I know he'll come back.

[SUSI *sits at left of table, her back to* PESTA. *She looks at door.*]

SUSI

If he only does.

PESTA

It'll be time enough to worry then.

SUSI

I won't give a darn what happens then, Pesta. I'd

go with him wherever he said. I've never seen anyone like him.

PESTA

Oh ho, the cabbage ain't the only thing round here that's warming up.

SUSI

Do you know what I hope's going to happen to me, one of these days?

PESTA

None of that, Susi. None of that.

SUSI

A big business and a nice husband who would change his shirt every day—

PESTA

Every day?

SUSI

When he came home from work, two nice light rooms.

PESTA

Two, eh?

SUSI

Pesta, I'm sick of cellars—

PESTA

You get kind o' fond of them when you've lived in 'em as long as I have.

SUSI

—and a servant girl,

PESTA

Eh? [*Looks startled.*]

SUSI

—and even six children.

PESTA

Let 'em all come.

SUSI

What'd I care? But all I'll get will be a grouchy husband, and a washtub, and the six children into the bargain.

PESTA

You never can tell.

SUSI

[*Crosses to box at foot of bed.*] But before all that happens—why can't I live the sort of life, I'd be glad to think about after—I'd like to get something out of life for myself—something I could call my very own. I'd like to take hold of some nice, handsome fellow.

PESTA

Susi! Susi!

SUSI

And love him and tease him and muss his hair and manage him.

PESTA

And if there was to be some unhappiness . . .

SUSI

Mother lived through hers.

PESTA

Of course, it's all right if it ends up with a nice chap like me. . . .

SUSI

Women can make your sort of nice chap out of any man. Pesta, sometimes I think I wouldn't care what happened to me. If a boy comes along that makes my heart tremble, do you expect me just to sit here and do nothing but recite the poor girl's ten commandments?

PESTA

No, Susi! . . . I know, humans is humans. [ALIK *is heard coming down the stairs.*] Sh! Sh! What did I tell you? [ALIK *enters, carrying several packages.*]

SUSI

[*Rises.*] Oh, you have come back? Well, I'm dressed. What have you brought?

PESTA

Maybe he thinks it's Christmas.

ALIK

For you.

SUSI

What's all this? [ALIK *goes over to* PESTA *and hands him a bottle of wine. They both turn and open packages.* SUSI *takes out a pretty coat, hat and gloves to match. Sternly.*] What did you do this for? [ALIK *confused.*] Oh! You mean I oughtn't go out with you looking like this. I'm sorry it isn't better—but it's all I could afford, and besides I made it myself.

ALIK

Did you?

SUSI

Yes, and I'm going in this or I'm not going at all; well?

ALIK

[*Convincingly.*] Oh, I didn't mean—

SUSI

Sure?

ALIK

Sure! [ALIK *looks her firmly in the eye.*]

SUSI

[*Soothingly.*] Then I'm not angry with you—you just wanted to be nice to me—didn't you?

ALIK

Yes.

PESTA

You see, Susi, you shouldn't have misunderstood him.

SUSI

"Oh, shut up, Pesta. It's all right now.

PESTA

[*Who has opened bottle.*] Sure then I'll be deaf and dumb and blind.

[ALIK *looks at* PESTA *then at* SUSI—*silence.*]

SUSI

Are you always as talkative as this?

ALIK

Yes!

SUSI

You know you're not going to be easy to understand. [ALIK *laughs.*] I'm glad you're happy about it, anyway. I guess I'll have to do most of the talking. But if we're going, let's go before Mother comes back. You came at just the right time. [*She gets hat from closet door, puts it on, then to right of him.*] What am I to call you?

ALIK

Alik.

SUSI

I'm Susi.

ALIK

[*Gives her his arm.*] Please.

SUSI

[*Goes to door—then turns.*] Wait! As long as I see you really aren't ashamed of me, I'll dress up for you. [*She runs into closet.*]

PESTA

Psst! Psst! I don't want to be yelling. [ALIK *goes over to* PESTA.] Fifty kronen might keep me from saying things, but not from answering questions. If you see what I mean. [ALIK *gives him another bill.*] Thanks. I hope you didn't misunderstand.

[SUSI *enters from closet.*]

SUSI

Well—how do I look? [ALIK *bends above her hand and kisses it. She puts on a glove.*] I'm going to keep the glove on, that you brought me when I go to bed tonight—so that'll be there tomorrow when I wake. [PESTA—"*Uh, huh.*"] Let's go, Alik. [*They run off.* SUSI *is already at the door, when* ALIK *leaps back to the cupboard and lays something in a pot. He is already bowing his adieux to* PESTA *when* SUSI *turns, and he follows her. The door has hardly closed when* PESTA *rises from his bed without any particular effort, runs gingerly to the shelf, looks through the pots, and takes several banknotes out of one of them.*]

PESTA

One, two, four, seven, ten. Ten hundred is what he left. Won't the old woman open her eyes at all this money? Ten hundred. But what'll she do with it all? One, anyway! She'll never know the difference. [*Goes a few steps and stops.*] One or two. She won't notice anything either way. She hasn't done the counting. And that young man won't be back. He's done his paying. That's what I call having honorable intentions. [*Takes another hundred and hides it in his shoe. As he does so he hears* MRS. PESTA *offstage, "Good afternoon, Mrs. Shulhofer," he races back to his bed leaps into it and pretends to be asleep.*] *All in pantomime*

[MRS. PESTA *enters.*]

MRS. PESTA

I've got that grocer off our necks for a while but he certainly cross-examined me about where we got the money.

PESTA

[*Waking up.*] The swine! You'd think he was the only one we owed money to.

MRS. PESTA

Well, he didn't put anything over on me.

PESTA

Did you forget something?

MRS. PESTA

[*Hands him the bottle.*] I'm not the forgettin' kind, but don't you drink it all at once. Where's Susi? [*Sits on bench.*]

[PESTA *accidentally strikes the first bottle with the one* MRS. PESTA *gives him,* MRS. PESTA *turns to him suspiciously and he speaks to cover his confusion.*]

PESTA

Susi's gone out for her walk.

MRS. PESTA

Out for her walk?

PESTA

That young swell came back for her.

MRS. PESTA

And you didn't make a move to stop her?

PESTA

How could you expect a helpless cripple like me to stop a healthy young fellow like him.

MRS. PESTA

This is a fine kettle of fish.

PESTA

He brought her a swell hat and a new coat, just now before you came.

MRS. PESTA

Where'd they go?

PESTA

How do I know, I ain't Gawd!

MRS. PESTA

What did he say to her?

PESTA

Nothing and I was listening with every drop of blood in me.

MRS. PESTA

He didn't eh? Well I'm going to the police station.

PESTA

None of that, none of that. If you do you'll be cutting down the little income that'll be coming to us.

MRS. PESTA

I will, will I? Well I'll—

PESTA

[*Rises and goes to her. Whispers placating her.*] Now wait a minute. He left something there on the shelf. Maybe his card. [*Back to bed.*]

MRS. PESTA

[*Finds the money.*] Here it is! . . . Eight hundred!

PESTA

That's somethin' ain't it?

MRS. PESTA

[*Raises her leg, lifts skirts, starts putting money in her stocking.*] Yes. That's a nice little nest egg. But why eight hundred? [*Sternly—back toward him.*] Pesta!

PESTA

Yes—dear?

MRS. PESTA

[*Emphatically.*] There weren't eight hundred to start with.

PESTA

What do I know about it?

MRS. PESTA

There were ten hundred and you took two.

PESTA

Me?

MRS. PESTA

A rich respectable gentleman like him only gives in round numbers. He'd give ten or five, not eight. He gave us a whole thousand. [*Crosses to* PESTA.] So you took two.

PESTA

[*Starts crying.*] How can you talk like that to me? What would I do with it? [*She glowers at him.*] I? Well, if you must know he gave me fifty the first time he was here, just to show he meant to do the right thing. Here take the fifty, you old miser. I'll show you how honest I am. [*Throws money on floor.*]

MRS. PESTA

[*Shaking him.*] Give me that two hundred. I know you've got it and I'll find it even if I have to strip you.

PESTA

Me, a rheumatic!

MRS. PESTA

Anybody with sense can see a fine young man like that doesn't hand out crumbs.

PESTA

Shut up, can't you?

MRS. PESTA

He'll pay through the nose for my tears. Ain't I her mother?

PESTA

She's certainly a bargain at eight hundred.

MRS. PESTA

I never told her what a darling she was—and now she's gone. [*Through tears.*] It was really ten, you old pickpocket. What can I do after she's gone ten whole minutes? Long enough for a girl to lose a war. [*Through tears.*] Well, God bless her. [*Picks up money—puts it in petticoat.*] Now, I've had twelve hundred in all for her little tow head.

PESTA

What?

MRS. PESTA

Two hundred when she was handed to me, and ten . . . ten— [*She holds her hand out.* PESTA *hands over one of the bills.*]

PESTA

You've got no heart and me full of aches and pains.

MRS. PESTA

[*She has put the bills in her other hand, holds her left hand out again.*] Ten—

PESTA

I said miser but it ain't the half of it. [*He hands her the other bill.*]

MRS. PESTA

Ten, Pesta . . . now that she's taken from me. [MRS. PESTA *in tears,* PESTA *mumbling, turns in his bed toward the wall.*]

CURTAIN

# *Act Two*

## *ACT TWO*

SCENE: *Interior of living room in* ALIK VILIM'S *bachelor quarters. Large French windows upstage left with an entrance through into the garden. A camine against the center upstage wall. Main entrance into the hall right of camine. Entrance into* SUSI'S *bedroom upstage and exactly opposite main door to living room. When the bedroom door is open, one can see a dressing table, with toilet articles on it, and a mirror. In the right wall, and slightly downstage of the main entrance is the door into* ALIK'S *room.* ALIK'S *desk is against the right wall downstage of door into his room, with typewriter, telephone, and assorted papers on it. In upstage right corner a business file with magazines on top. Center stage a sofa, with round table downstage and slightly left of it, leather chair left of table, small armchair downstage and right of sofa.* SUSI'S *desk extreme left with ashtray etc. but no papers on it. Chair at desk, and leather chair right of it. Small table with flowers on it downstage left of* SUSI'S *desk. Chair at* ALIK'S *desk.*

SUSI *sits at table center.* SERVANT *right of table center.*

SUSI

I hope I didn't make any worse mistakes than that yesterday.

SERVANT

You were as perfect as usual, Madam.

SUSI

What you really mean is as imperfect as usual, don't you? Well, what was wrong?

SERVANT

Only the merest trifle.

SUSI

Well—tell me.

SERVANT

Well, madam, when you came into the hall—

SUSI

Yes—when I came into the hall—?

SERVANT

Well, since you insist on frankness, and since you will permit me, I shall be delighted to give you my impressions—

SUSI

Well—go on—

SERVANT

Well, as I was saying, when you entered the hall, you did not start taking off your coat yourself. You waited till one of the gentlemen came to you. Now, the perfectly bred lady—

SUSI

Does what? . . .

SERVANT

Starts to take off her coat herself. The ideal lady doesn't wait for help from anybody.

SUSI

Yes—I see what you mean. Now I know how far I am from the ideal lady.

SERVANT

Not at all, Madam. But if you will permit me to offer you the consolation—in my entire experience in all classes of society, I assure you it has been my privilege to meet only one perfect lady. She was the Princess of Romberg-Lippe, and she was nearly eighty.

SUSI

Thanks. Then there's still time, isn't there?

SERVANT

Years, Madam, years.

SUSI

[*Rises, goes and sits at her desk left.*] Please arrange the papers for Alik—so that he can get to work—[SERVANT *lifts his eyebrow and stops as she says "Alik"*] I mean, for Mr. Vilim—[*The* SERVANT *goes to the desk right.*] What have you got for lunch?

[SERVANT *looks reprimandingly and stops.*] Is the menu ready?

SERVANT

[*Smiles, goes back to her—handing it to her.*] If you please, Madam.

SUSI

We are to be four today, including the two guests. And please don't have broiled mushrooms. They gave Alik terrible cramps, last night. [SERVANT *lifts his eyebrow.*] I mean—they don't agree with him. And don't forget to have three bottles of champagne.

SERVANT

Yes, Madam. . . . [*Starts to go.*]

SUSI

Even though we are going to celebrate Mr. Vilim's success. [SERVANT *turns.*] I suppose two would do—

SERVANT

Might I suggest?—

SUSI

Oh, very well! Make it three, then!

SERVANT

Yes, I think that would be best, Madam. Success should always be celebrated with something just a little more than is necessary.

SUSI

Where are yesterday's bills?

SERVANT

[*Takes bills out of pocket.*] Here, Madam.

SUSI

Speaking of the wine . . .

SERVANT

Yes, Madam.

[ALIK *comes out of his room fully dressed, except for his tie, which is not yet knotted. He throws* SUSI *a kiss and whistles to her. She smiles at him.*

SUSI

Good morning, Lambkin. [*Disregarding* ALIK, SUSI *turns to* SERVANT. ALIK *moves and sits at his desk, disgustedly.*]We are going to buy our wine after this where Director Bezchyba told us. Where it's better and cheaper. Please send for the man and tell me when he comes.

SERVANT

[*Bows.*] Certainly, Madam. [*Starts to go—sees* ALIK's *untied tie.*] Your tie, sir.

[SUSI *looks over some more bills. The* SERVANT *goes to* ALIK, *who starts tying his tie.*]

SUSI

Not like that!

SERVANT

Your pardon, if you will permit me, sir.

SUSI

It's got to be perfectly tied today. When you're going to a serious conference both ends of your tie have got to be of the same length. [SERVANT *finishes with tie.*] Thank you. [SERVANT *goes off.* ALIK *tries to work,* SUSI *also, he can't finish it, goes to her, sits on upstage edge of table, kisses her.*] I am sorry I had to keep you waiting, but there were so many things I had to do about the house. [ALIK *make a gesture of negation.*] But I tell you, they *do* matter. I've got something to do besides just loving you, dear!

ALIK

Susi!

SUSI

I know you'd be willing just to let things run themselves as long as I love you. I know that's all you want of me. Don't you tell me so in the dear letters you write me every day? You've got to stop writing me those letters. [*He rises, goes to right.*] Lambkin! Are you going to write me one today? [ALIK *lifts two fingers.*] Two—there you are. I knew you would! Who said I wasn't clever to guess you mean two. Did you have enough breakfast? I still spoil you by letting you have your breakfast in bed. [ALIK *sits.*] Now hurry round

to the office. You've got to be on time when they tell you you're going to be a member of the Firm. You haven't forgotten your pipe, have you? [ALIK *takes out pipe from his pocket.*] That's it! Now, practice lighting it. As a member of the Board . . . [*he sits slouchily*] of the Transatlantic Trust—I said as a member of the Board, [*he straightens*] you must either talk a great deal—[*he makes a wry face*] or be very, very silent. [*He is pleased.*] It's much easier to be silent when you're smoking. [*He makes a wry face.*] I don't care if it does make you feel sick. You've just got to practice it till you look as if you were enjoying it. [*Broad smile from* ALIK.] That's it! Now, where's the speech you're going to make? Read it to me—[*He hands her the paper.*] I said read it to me. [*He insists. She reads.*] "Darling little Susi"— [*He leans anxiously over table at her.*] But this isn't your speech. [*She gives it back to him. He puts it in his pocket.*] Come on, now, Lambkin, where's your speech? [ALIK *takes the same paper out of his pocket*—SUSI *looks at it, smiles, then reads.*] "Darling little Susi—Yesterday you were much more amused with our guest than you were with me, and you had a right to be. He was so much cleverer than I was. Didn't you realize how angry I was because I was so awkward and helpless and unable to say anything? I wish I could say charming things and then you'd snuggle up close to me and muss my hair the way you used to. [ALIK *takes her hand and musses his hair with it.*] Do you really love me any more?" [SUSI *folds the letter*

*and puts it away.*] How can you ask that, Alik? Don't you know I wouldn't give you up for anything or anybody in all the world? [ALIK *kisses her ardently.*] Don't you know that I see things in your eyes that no one can see?

ALIK

[*Joyous.*] Susi! I—I—I—

SUSI

You don't have to talk. I understand your silence. I know what you are thinking just as easily as if I were seeing it in a cinema. And if I could ever misunderstand it, your little letters would always set me right. They're like the captions between the pictures which explain things. Most of them are not necessary—but when they come from you, they're very nice. [ALIK *kisses her hands—then sits on back of her chair.*] You haven't learned to say very much, my dear, but what you have learned is all that matters. Say what you've learned, Alik.

ALIK

I love you!—

SUSI

Say it again.[*They kiss. She leans back in chair.*] That's it, Alik. That's just what all the books and all the people and everything in the world says. Well—that's that. But now, I've got to hear your speech! Now, I'll be the Firm. Come on over and read it to me. [*She rises, crosses to center, sits on sofa. He follows*

*her, and snuggles next to her.*] I said, I've got to hear your speech. [*He rises, stands like an orator, left of table.*] Read it, Alik.

ALIK

[*Takes another paper and reads somewhat carelessly and monotonously.*] Gentlemen, I thank you—[*pipe in his mouth, she takes it out*] for the flattering regard you have evidenced for me in electing me as member of the Board of such a distinguished commercial enterprise as our Transatlantic Transport Trust. [*Pulls himself to full height.*] This enterprise has a most important part to play in the life of the city of Prague—and in the life of the entire civilized world. [*Hand in air, looks at her. She nods, he is slightly self-conscious.*]

SUSI

Splendid, Splendid! And—

ALIK AND SUSI

[*Together with* SUSI *as leader.*] Summing up, Gentlemen, what can I better say than: With all my heart, I wish the Firm of Vilim & Co. all the success which it so rightly deserves.

SUSI

[*Enthusiastically.*] Why, that's magnificent. Didn't we work it out nicely together. That's just the way a Director should speak!

ALIK

Yes.

SUSI

But why did you tell them you didn't want to become a member of the Firm. They couldn't understand it at all. But I told them it was your modesty, and now they admire you all the more for it. I know—I can see in your face that you're still wondering whether you can do it. But, of course, you can! You don't have to worry, darling. Directors don't have to do any real work. All they have to do is sign papers and you know how nicely you write!

ALIK

[*He goes to her.*] Susi!

SUSI

No, no, no, no— [*She crosses to her desk, picks up appointment book,—he comes front of table.*] Now, let me see what else you've got to do? Not much for today, and you can leave the office as soon as the ceremonies are over— [ALIK *in ecstasy*] and come straight home—because we're going to have company for lunch. Now, run along—[*he starts to go*] and don't forget your pipe! [*Gets it from table and gives it to him. She kisses him. Then goes to her desk. He backs off saying good-bye, looking at her—pauses right of couch.*]

ALIK

Good-bye.

SUSI

[*Turns.*] Good-bye, darling. And please don't look at me like that, or I won't be able to let you go.

ALIK

Good-bye. [*He goes. She follows him out. Then she goes to the telephone.*]

SUSI

Number 11-2-5-1, please. Hurry, please! If I were at the other end of the wire, I'd show you how to get a number. It's very important! What?—Thank you. 11-2-5-1? Counselor Andrejs, please! Hello! Counselor Andrejs. Yes, it's me. Just fine, thank you. Oh, Counselor, do like Alik's speech today—even if you don't. You will, won't you? You know how shy he is. Of course, of course, I am expecting you at one. And there's goulash—the kind you like—just for you—yes, at one o'clock. Good-bye. [*The* SERVANT *enters.*]

SERVANT

I beg your pardon—

SUSI

Yes?—

SERVANT

There's a person outside wants to talk to you.

SUSI

What sort of a person?

SERVANT

A woman, Madam.

SUSI

Didn't she give you her name?

SERVANT

No. I don't imagine she's on your visiting list, Madam.

SUSI

Why not?

SERVANT

Because her manners seem a little over energetic.

SUSI

Oh—oh! [*Happily.*] That's my mother. Show her in.

SERVANT

Very well. This way, Madam. [*He shows* MRS. PESTA *in.* MRS. PESTA *keeps looking at him.*]

SUSI

[*Up to door.*] Hullo, Mother! [*Exchange greetings, loudly calling each other's names.*]

SERVANT

Madam! Madam! [*Goes.*]

MRS. PESTA

That there fellow's got awful fancy manners.

SUSI

He's paid for them.

MRS. PESTA

[*Seeing* SUSI's *pajamas.*] Well, for God's sake!

SUSI

It's all right, Mother, that's the way I dress these days.

MRS. PESTA

[*Sits on sofa with* SUSI.] My little Susi, well, anyway, let's have a good look at you. My dear, even though it's your mother who says so, I got to acknowledge that all this agrees with you. You look almost better as a woman than you did as a girl. And all in three months! You're certainly a wonder, Susi! Only three months of this sort of life, and you're a lady already!

SUSI

It took some work, though!

MRS. PESTA

Well, life means work. How's everything, darling?

SUSI

I've been living in heaven, Mother.

MRS. PESTA

But there's a hitch in it—I always suspected there

was something wrong with heaven. I come to thank you for the money.

SUSI

That's all right, Mother.

MRS. PESTA

Pesta and I was kinda surprised when it come. I thought you was goin' to forget all about me, and the first thing you did was to remember me by sendin' me 5,000 kronen! That's the way a good girl ought to remember her mama.

SUSI

Oh, don't mention it!

MRS. PESTA

Mention it? Well, I like that! Yes, it must be hard, being a lady! You know what I'm goin' to do with it, darling?

SUSI

Do anything you want to.

MRS. PESTA

That's just what I'm goin' to do! What do you think of my starting a delicatessen store?

SUSI

No, I've been thinking of something else—I've got an extremely good idea, and that's why I asked you to come. Would you like some tea?

MRS. PESTA

Now, don't go spendin' money on me! It'd take me a long while to get used to a room like this. It's so pretty you could tell right away it ain't right. I hope it lasts, darling. Do you think it's goin' to?

SUSI

Of course, it's going to. Alik's a darling, and we're terribly in love.

MRS. PESTA

Well, I hope so! But, Susi—are you sure of it? Does he tell you so every day?

SUSI

No, he doesn't.

MRS. PESTA

There you are! I knew there was a hitch in it some place. You got to get him into the habit of tellin' you, dearie! And after a while he'll believe it.

SUSI

He doesn't tell me. He writes it to me.

MRS. PESTA

Good! That's it, darling! I knew you were my daughter, after all!

SUSI

[*Disregarding her.*] He always writes everything he wants to tell me. Every day, he sends me at least one

letter. And they're all lovelier than anything he could say.

MRS. PESTA

I hope you're careful what you do with them?

SUSI

They're dearer to me than anything in the world! I'll show you, Mother. [*Crosses to her desk on speech.*]

MRS. PESTA

Of course, dear, and they're goin' to be ever dearer.

SUSI

I have every one of them.

MRS. PESTA

Sure you have. Ain't you my little Susi.

SUSI

[*She takes them from the desk.*] Look, Mother. They're all here.

MRS. PESTA

As many as that? Why, two or three would have been enough. You're your mama's little girl, aren't you? Thank God, I haven't lived in vain! Could your loving mama see one?

SUSI

Of course. Would you believe it?—I love to read them over and over again, and sometimes they make me cry.

MRS. PESTA

[*Reading it.*] "Vilim and Son . . . Wholesale Exporters and Wholesale Importers . . . Main office in Brunn, Branches in Prague and Vienna . . . Telegraph address, Prague, Czecho-Slovakia . . ." [*Very disappointed.* ] What's this?

SUSI

Go on, Mother.

MRS. PESTA

[*She reads a bit and smiles—mumbles a bit.*] Ah! This is better! Much better, my dear . . . "Darling Little Susi—" These machines certainly write nice and clear . . . "My work has flown today. I'm going to hurry up and get everything done so as to rush home to you, my dearest. This evening we'll climb the streets up to the top of Mt. Lauries, and we'll have coffee." Don't he give you any dinner? Just coffee? "And then we'll sit there just saying nothing till the lights come out down below in the city, and then when it's all dark we'll climb down again. And on every step, we will stop and kiss—" Yes, it's a nice clear machine . . . "See you in an hour, darling. Lovingly, your Lambkin." That's certainly beautiful! But why Lambkin?"

SUSI

That's what I call him.

MRS. PESTA

Are the others letters as nice as this?

SUSI

Some of them are even nicer.

MRS. PESTA

I mean, have they all got "Vilim and Son" printed on the letter? And are they all signed "Lambkin"?

SUSI

Yes.

MRS. PESTA

You little fool, you! Don't you know if they're all like this they're not worth a cent? The judge would throw them out of court, and his relatives will say there ain't no "Lambkin" in the family. They're all alike! It was just the same with your father.

SUSI

But I never thought of it that way.

MRS. PESTA

You got to think of everything every way. I've learned out of a bitter experience that there's nothing so expensive as this free love, unless you know how to manage it.

SUSI

Don't be afraid, Mother. I'll know how to take care of myself. Something beautiful's got to come out of all this happiness!

[MRS. PESTA *looks at her physical condition.*]

SUSI

What's the matter, Mother?

MRS. PESTA

Well, as long as it's something solid, I don't care. It will even be all right if all you get out of it is a good job. Maybe it will teach you how to be the right kind of a housekeeper to some lonely bachelor. That's the sort of a job for any decent girl who knows what's what. Why, I know a girl who was a housekeeper to an old man, and when he died she was able to go into the antique business just by starting a store with all the trash he left her.

SUSI

I won't have to think about that, Mother. I've got quite a little money put away already.

MRS. PESTA

[*Endearingly.*] Have you, Schnucksy. [*Patting her cheek.*]

SUSI

Yes, and I want to invest it in something. That's what I want to talk over with you. It's quite a good deal of money.

MRS. PESTA

How much, Susi?

SUSI

Guess?

MRS. PESTA

Now, don't go askin' your mama to guess!

SUSI

Thirty thousand.

MRS. PESTA

Good God! Does he love you that much?

SUSI

It didn't come from him.

MRS. PESTA

Now, Susi, don't tell me you—!

SUSI

All he gives me is the money for the household. That's fair enough, isn't it?

MRS. PESTA

You're managin' it. How should I know?

SUSI

I made most of it on the Stock Market. Sometimes it goes wrong, but on the whole I've been lucky.

MRS. PESTA

But this Stock Market business sounds *wicked* to me. It mayn't always turn out.

SUSI

Well, it has, ever since I've been listening to Alik's

friends that came here. I began thinking about it the first time Andrejs came. He's the Director of ten banks, and if he didn't know about things, who would?

MRS. PESTA

No, I don't like it at all! My little girl had better watch out. Susi, Susi, when I look at you, I am ashamed.

SUSI

Well, don't let it worry you, Mother. I haven't done anything that I'm ashamed of. And even if I had, your hands are clean.

MRS. PESTA

Of course, they're clean. [*She shows them.*]

SUSI

Well, I'm glad they are, because Andrejs's coming here today, and he'll be sure to kiss your hand.

MRS. PESTA

Better not get fresh with me! I'm through with that sort of thing.

SUSI

You be nice to him, Mother. He's been awfully kind to me, Mother.

MRS. PESTA

Come to think of it, I was peelin' onions this morning for Pesta. Rheumatism or not, that man's still a hog when it comes to a nice greasy onion soup. Do you

remember, Susi, on St. Wenceslas Day, when we used to have onion soup and garlic.

SUSI

Uh-huh.

MRS. PESTA

It wasn't so bad then, was it?

SUSI

No. [*They rock happily. Bell rings.*]

MRS. PESTA

Maybe, if your fancy friends are coming, I'd better wash 'em again.

SUSI

Go into *my* room, and if you want to fix yourself up a bit—

MRS. PESTA

What?

SUSI

—help yourself to anything in there.

[SERVANT *comes in at right of arch.*]

MRS. PESTA

[*Rises, bluntly to* SERVANT.] I want to wash my hands.

SERVANT

Director Bezchyba is here.

MRS. PESTA

That's why I want to wash 'em.

SUSI

It's right in there, behind my room, Mother.

MRS. PESTA

Imagine living in one room and washing in another! And all this has happened to my daughter! What'll Pesta say when he hears of it?

SUSI

Wait a minute, Mother. I'll pick out something for you that you'll look nice in.

MRS. PESTA

Now, don't go thinkin' I'm goin' to let you dress me up like you!

SUSI

Show him in. All right, Mother. I know. [SUSI *and* MRS. PESTA *go off into bedroom. The* SERVANT *shows in* DIRECTOR BEZCHYBA.]

SERVANT

This way, sir.

BEZCHYBA

Madam told me to be here at one.

SERVANT

[*Back of left end of sofa.*] She'll be in in a minute, sir.

BEZCHYBA

[*Sits on right end of sofa.*] And how are you?

SERVANT

I'm quite well, sir. Of course, I don't have to ask you.

BEZCHYBA

Thank you.

SERVANT

Not at all, sir.

BEZCHYBA

Anything new?

SERVANT

Things are about the same, sir. Everything is going along very nicely here.

BEZCHYBA

Oh, I don't mean here. I mean—anything new in Prague worth seeing?

SERVANT

I recommend the exhibition of 18th century French pastellists. Some of them have an exquisite quality. You'll enjoy them, sir.

BEZCHYBA

Thanks for telling me. I'll just quote what you say everywhere, and that will save me the trouble of going.

SERVANT

I might also recommend the new staging of "The Ring" at the Opera. There's still a little of Wagner left in it.

BEZCHYBA

I'm glad you keep up your interest in music.

SERVANT

Yes, sir. I used to spend all my Sunday mornings improvising when I had the time. But my spare time is crowded now.

BEZCHYBA

Yes?

SERVANT

You see, sir, on Sunday mornings now I give lectures on Kant's Critique of Pure Reason, at the Labor Sunday School. [*Then, as* SUSI *enters.*] Director Bezchyba, Madam.

[BEZCHYBA *rises.*]

SUSI

Hello, Director! [*She catches the* SERVANT's *eye.*] Charmed, my dear friend! [SERVANT *motions something to drink.*] You'll have something to drink before lunch, won't you?

BEZCHYBA

Thank you.

SUSI

Bring the [*"Aperitifs" is mumbled by* SERVANT] aperitifs, please! [*Then, as the* SERVANT *goes, she turns to* BEZCHYBA.] You know how always delighted I am to see you! [*She breaks into laughter.*] I'm awfully glad you came. [SUSI *sits on sofa.*] Do sit down. [*He sits beside her.*]

BEZCHYBA

I brought you the 4,000 shares of railroad stock. It was an awfully good investment. [*Hands her stock certificate.*]

SUSI

Yes, and I owe it to you.

BEZCHYBA

Not entirely. You're clever enough to know when to take a tip. That's the difference between you and foolish people. They take them all. Sometimes I think I ought to set you up in the brokerage business.

SUSI

Thanks, but I don't believe I'd be clever enough for that.

BEZCHYBA

I don't know, I don't know.

SUSI

But, we'll forget business for a little while. Let's just enjoy ourselves today! Did you go over to Vilim

& Son to hear Alik's speech? In spite of the fact that the luncheon is to celebrate Alik's success, the first thing I thought of was to have the blanc mange you're so fond of. [Susi *goes to her desk, puts letters and stock certificate in drawer then comes to back of couch.* Bezchyba *draws her down again.*]

Bezchyba

No one can resist it, when your sweet fingers are in it, Susi. Now sit down, we've got a little time before lunch. But there's just one other bit of business, if you don't mind. I've also got you the option on the hundred other shares you asked me to. They weren't easy to get, but I told them they were for a charming, charming, lady. [*Kisses her hands.*]

Susi

You *are* a darling. Counselor Andrejs is coming, too.

Bezchyba

Are you telling me that to make me jealous?

Susi

I didn't mean to, but perhaps it's as good a reason as any.

[Mrs. Pesta *enters in a rather tight blouse with a woolen shawl around her shoulders.*]

Mrs. Pesta

It's kind o' tight, Susi.

SUSI

[BEZCHYBA *rises.*] Mother, this is Director Bezchyba. —Director Bezchyba, my mother.

BEZCHYBA

[*Very gallantly.*] Charmed, dear lady!

MRS. PESTA

[*Comes right of couch.*] How do you do, sir! [*Bows.*] Didn't we meet this gentleman a long time ago, Susi? Let me see where? Oh, yes! I know! you were with the lady of the charity organization the day you were good enough to bring my poor old husband home. There you are! You see, I did remember you! [*Sits on chair, right.*]

BEZCHYBA

[*Steps left, front of table.*] But I would never have recognized you, Madam,—you look so charming.

MRS. PESTA

Will you listen to him, Susi!

[*The* SERVANT *enters with the aperitifs.*]

SUSI

[*Rises, to table.*] Director, you'll have some citronnade and seltzer, won't you?

BEZCHYBA

You know I always do.



*Setting by Lee Simonson* *Photo by Vandamm*

A SCENE FROM ACT TWO

SUSI

Yes. That's why I asked you. A little sugar?

MRS. PESTA

Don't put so much in. It's expensive.

SUSI

It's cheap, Mother.

BEZCHYBA

It won't be much longer.

SUSI

Oh, really? Not much longer?

MRS. PESTA

Well, as long as you're wasting it, you might as well give me a drop. This stuff smells so bad, I bet it's expensive. [*Pours herself a whole glass. Sits on sofa right of* SUSI.]

SUSI

It's not too expensive for my friends. Mother's here on business, Director. Would you believe it, she wants to start a milk depot.

MRS. PESTA

What's that?

SUSI

Weren't you just telling me, Mother dear?

MRS. PESTA

Yeh! What I told you I wanted was a—

SUSI

—nice, clean place where people could buy good milk.

MRS. PESTA

Yeh!

SUSI

Exactly. But I think it would be an awfully nice idea to call it Prague's Model Dairy, don't you, Director?

BEZCHYBA

Prague's Model Dairy, eh?

SUSI

[*And, before he can answer.*] Why, Mother's been smart enough to pick out the store already. There's a nice place on the corner of Hybernergasse and Velkenam Platz. She's worked the whole thing out.

MRS. PESTA

Uh-huh.

SUSI

She's going to have everything absolutely up to date. All sorts of hygienic improvements and sterilization instruments, and there's going to be a silver cow for the children. Mother's awfully clever. Aren't you, dear?

MRS. PESTA

Wise enough, Susi. It's a grand idea, ain't it, sir?

BEZCHYBA

Splendid! [*Sits in chair back of table.*]

SUSI

Yes. Mother wants to have a dairy where anybody can bring their children without being afraid. It's to be the first model dairy in Prague.

MRS. PESTA

Yes, and if the store is on two streets, we'll get people coming both ways.

SUSI

It's sure to be a success.

MRS. PESTA

And why not? Any dairy could be a success where there's running water. [*She laughs.*]

BEZCHYBA

[*Laughs loudly.*] Ha, ha, I see what you mean.

SUSI

Now, Mama! No joking! You know in your dairy milk's going to be milk, and cream's going to be cream, and we will only use the water for cleaning up.

MRS. PESTA

Well, that's just what I meant, Susi!

SUSI

I know, dear. And if the first is a success, it's Mother's idea that we will have another. And before you know, we'll have a whole string of them, and it will be one of the best businesses in Prague. Quite an idea, don't you think so, Director?

BEZCHYBA

Yes—it does sound pretty good to me.

SERVANT

Counselor Andrejs, Madam.

SUSI

Show him in.

BEZCHYBA

[*Rises, goes to* SUSI's *desk, gets cigarette.*] He's always on time, isn't he?

SUSI

[*Rises, goes back of couch.*] I'm glad he is, because we are going to sign the lease for the store this morning, and we will need two witnesses. If you would—?

MRS. PESTA

Uh-huh.

[SUSI *smiles up at* BEZCHYBA.]

BEZCHYBA

[*Rises, bows.*] I am yours to command, my dear.

SUSI

You are a darling.

SERVANT

[*In hall.*] This way, sir. Counselor Andrejs.

SUSI

[*As* ANDREJS *comes in.*] Delighted [*up to him in grand manner*] my dear Andrejs.

[MRS. PESTA *laughs.*]

MRS. PESTA

Will you watch her?

SUSI

How good of you to come for the celebration.

ANDREJS

But I am always delighted to dine here.

SUSI

I haven't forgotten your goulash.

BEZCHYBA

His goulash, eh?

SUSI

Andrejs, this is my mother.

[MRS. PESTA *rises, gives her hand, he kisses it. She suffers,* BEZCHYBA *laughs.*]

ANDREJS

Charmed, Madam. [*Sits on chair right.*]

SUSI

Oh, do sit down, everybody. [SUSI *sits next to her mother,* BEZCHYBA *left,* ANDREJS, *right.*]

MRS. PESTA

Well, now that everybody knows everybody, how about eating? It's nearly one, ain't it? I feel a rumble, Schnucksy.

SUSI

One! That reminds me—I've got to telephone! Excuse me! [*She goes to 'phone.*] Hello?—One—oh—seven—two—four, please! As quickly as possible. I know some of you can be quick when you want to. Thanks. —Ziman and Company, stock brokers. [*Both men look at* SUSI.] This is Account 1527 talking.—I've decided to buy three carloads of sugar immediately. Am I in time before the market closes? Just in time? Thank you! Perhaps, you had better make it four carloads.

BEZCHYBA

Four!

SUSI

[*Smiles at men.*] That's about 10,000 kilos, isn't it?

[*During telephone speech,* ANDREJS *offers* MRS. PESTA *a cigarette. She looks startled and says. "What do you think I am?" He offers one to* BEZCHYBA and sits *on sofa left of* MRS. PESTA.]

MRS. PESTA

In the name of the suffering Saviour, Susi! What do you want all that sugar for? You wouldn't be able to eat it if you lived till a hundred. [*All laugh.*]

SUSI

[*Steps to center.*] Isn't Mother just too quaint? It's a speculation, darling! [*Men laugh.*]

SERVANT

The man has come from the wine shop, Madam.

SUSI

[*To* SERVANT] I'll come and speak to him.

MRS. PESTA

[*Rises.*] The wine shop? He's apt to do you, dearie. You better let me help handle him.

SUSI

Gentlemen, I'll be a moment. I'll have to change my dress since we've got to go out to sign the lease for the store before luncheon.

ANDREJS

What store? [*Both men rise.*]

SUSI

[*At the door.*] You'll excuse me, won't you?

[SUSI *exits and* MRS. PESTA *follows her out.*]

BEZCHYBA

[ANDREJS *sits on sofa left end.*] I'd like to know how she found out that sugar was going up. I thought I was the first one to know it, and I heard it only half an hour ago. You know, Andrejs—I've been thinking things over—

ANDREJS

Yes? What?

BEZCHYBA

What! Probably the same things you have. [*Sits on chair, left of* SUSI'S *table.*] If Alik doesn't marry her, he's an incurable jackass.

ANDREJS

Yes, but what do you think old Vilim would say? The whole thing isn't going to be easy. [BEZCHYBA *sits.*] The Firm needs Mama Bojok's money and Miss Lilli has been on the market a couple of years now and after all, society is still society.

BEZCHYBA

Yes . . . I know. . . .

ANDREJS

And family traditions—

BEZCHYBA

Traditions! Don't you think it would be fairer to call them prejudices?

ANDREJS

Vilim isn't as rich as he used to be, Director.

BEZCHYBA

Yes, I know. But he's got enough left anyway so that his money could be of use.

ANDREJS

Eh?

BEZCHYBA

What's the good of money, if it can't help to make people human?

ANDREJS

Yeh.

BEZCHYBA

If the whole thing weren't good for Alik, it would certainly be good for Susi. Most of the young men of what you call society aren't worth that! [*He snaps his fingers.*] They've got so much they haven't anything—like Alik, for instance. Isn't he a pretty fair example? He doesn't even have to bother talking any more.

ANDREJS

He doesn't talk because he's never had to.

BEZCHYBA

Yes. Other people do the talking for him. If this sort of thing goes on, maybe his children won't even know how to chew. What's to become of us? We can't afford to turn up our noses at people like Susi. We've

got to learn how to mix with the people. That's why I am suggesting this. The infiltration's got to come somehow and why not through this dairy?

ANDREJS

Dairy?

BEZCHYBA

Yes, that's the store she was speaking of, they're going to start a string of dairies.

ANDREJS

Oh!

BEZCHYBA

It's a very good business proposition. I'm going to put some capital into it myself.

ANDREJS

Are you?

BEZCHYBA

There'll be first one dairy—then twenty. It will be the making of both of them. If anybody can do it, she can.

[MRS. PESTA *comes into right corner of arch.*]

MRS. PESTA

That child's got more clothes than she can ever use. She just gave me a shawl and this umbrella. Would you believe it? She says she's never even opened the umbrella.

BEZCHYBA

Mrs. Pesta, what do you think Counselor Andrejs and I have decided?

MRS. PESTA

How should I know?

BEZCHYBA

Well, that's just it! You *should* know.

MRS. PESTA

Well, if it's a shock, start it slow! [*Sits on sofa fast. They laugh.*] Why are you looking at each other that way?

ANDREJS

Tell her. [*Sits on couch left.*]

BEZCHYBA

[*Bluntly.*] We just both agreed that Susi and Alik should marry.

MRS. PESTA

Well, now that's really very nice of you. But we ain't as lucky as that. It's never happened to us before. No, that can't happen!

ANDREJS

And why not?

MRS. PESTA

It's all foolishness!

POINT PARK COLLEGE LIBRARY

ANDREJS

Why foolishness?

MRS. PESTA

Didn't you learn in school how hard it is for a rich man to get into heaven?

ANDREJS

What's the Bible got to do with it?

MRS. PESTA

Just this! It's just as hard for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle as for a rich man to marry a girl that's poor.

ANDREJS

If it wasn't Alik, it would be someone else.

MRS. PESTA

Well, no one rich! All of the rich young men have got humps on their backs, and they are just about as useful as a dead camel.

BEZCHYBA

That's pretty much what we were saying before you came in.

MRS. PESTA

Were you? How should you know about it, being rich?

BEZCHYBA

Well, maybe we are still poor enough to have a little imagination!

MRS. PESTA

Who's goin' to guarantee that it's all goin' to be fine for her if they marry under the circumstances. Ain't she something of a camel, too? Why should they be tryin' to push her through the eye of the needle? Well, whichever way you look at it, I'm sorry for the camel!

SUSI

[*Enters.*] Come along, Mother. We'll just have time to sign the lease before lunch.

MRS. PESTA

It ain't decent, changing your clothes so many times a day!

SUSI

Gentlemen,—[*Taking letters from table to desk.*] You will come with us, won't you? It will be shorter for us to cut through the garden. Come along, Mother. You know, Counselor, I think Mother's awful clever. [*They go off.*]

[BEZCHYBA *waits at door—bows as* MRS. PESTA *comes.*]

MRS. PESTA

I'll never get used to all this bowing. [*They exeunt. The* SERVANT *clears the citronnade tray. A bell rings*

*outside. He goes to answer it. Loud voices are heard. After a pause, a* LADY *and* HER DAUGHTER *enter.*]

SERVANT

Madam!

LADY

[*Coming center.*] Mr. Vilim asked us to meet him here for luncheon.

SERVANT

Did he, Ma'am?

DAUGHTER

Tell him which Mr. Vilim, Mother. Do you expect him to believe that Alik could make up his mind about anything?

LADY

[*To the* SERVANT.] Of course, I mean Mr. Joseph Vilim. He came in from his estates when he heard that his son had been elected to the Board. He was so amazed he had to come to town to find out whether it was true or not. [*Sits right end of couch.* LILLI *goes to window.*] He was actually at the meeting and applauded his speech. That's very unlike him. Do you know Mr. Vilim's father?

SERVANT

It has not yet been my privilege to meet his Excellency, Madam.

LADY

He said he thought life had no more surprises left for him.

SERVANT

One must always be prepared for surprises. I've found that's the only way to make life a pleasurable disappointment. If you need anything the bell is there. [SERVANT *exits.*]

LADY

My dear, do you think he was trying to be impertinent?

DAUGHTER

[*Crosses to couch.*] Why, no, Mother. He seemed to have a very sensitive point of view for a servant.

LADY

Perhaps you're right. Well, anyhow, I'm not going to let it trouble me. I've been excited enough this morning. I mustn't let myself be disturbed twice in one day before my cure at Wiesbaden.

DAUGHTER

No, of course, Mother.

LADY

I'm worn out as it is! Utterly! I could hardly control myself when I visited your father's grave today.

DAUGHTER

Why do you go, Mother?

LADY

There are duties to the dead, undeniable duties to the dead. These anniversaries are getting too much for me! Even though it is the loveliest mausoleum in the Wolschan cemetery, I became quite hysterical—quite, my dear—when I noticed how the birds had been treating that beautiful figure of the weeping angel! I could hardly bear it!

DAUGHTER

No, of course, dear, you're much too sensitive.

LADY

Sensitive! But then, as everybody knows birds are animals and animals have no respect for grief. It's upset me, dear—terribly!—terribly! And all that wasn't enough. Now this servant with his patronizing manner—

LILLI

Nonsense, Mother.

LADY

—caps the climax. Of course, my dear, we'll get rid of him when everything is settled between you and Alik—

DAUGHTER

When . . .

LADY

It's beginning to seem as if no one was interested in your marriage but me! Doesn't it concern you at all?

DAUGHTER

[*Rises, goes to fireplace.*] Well, to be honest, dear, he doesn't really excite me.

LADY

Excite you—

DAUGHTER

You know what I mean, don't you?

LADY

Excite you—and why not?

DAUGHTER

Because, when I dream of a husband, I dream of a glorious sort of Samson— [*Goes to front of* SUSI'S *desk.*]

LADY

Samson?

DAUGHTER

A superb locomotive engineer, smelling of grime and sweat, who would grind me to bits when I irritated him. [*Sits on desk.*]

LADY

Please, spare me that. Don't you realize that no one you know is as suitable or as pliable as Alik.

DAUGHTER

[*Opening her cigarette case.*] Not a cigarette left! Have you any with you, Mother?

LADY

You know I never smoke when I am out!

DAUGHTER

There must be some somewhere. [*She pulls the bell-rope.*]

LADY

How often have I told you that you smoke too much?

DAUGHTER

But, dearest, I've *got* to do *something!* [SERVANT *enters.*] Where are the cigarettes? [*Back to right of* SUSI'S *desk.*]

SERVANT

[*Taking an elaborate case from his pocket.*] If you will permit me? These are unique in Prague. A friend of mine in the diplomatic service has just brought in a few from Alexandria.

DAUGHER

Thanks, awfully! [*She takes one.*] What a beautiful case!

SERVANT

Yes, I've always admired it myself. It was a prize I got five years ago, when I won first place in a ten kilometre obstacle race.

DAUGHTER

Oh! So, you're interested in sports?

SERVANT

Yes, yes—when I have a moment to spare, I play football.

DAUGHTER

Mother, he plays football!

LADY

I'm not sure we're interested.

SERVANT

That is all, Madam?

DAUGHTER

[*Smiling*] Thanks! The cigarette is excellent.

[SERVANT *goes off*. DAUGHTER *follows to back of sofa.*]

DAUGHTER

Mother, Mother—

LADY

Yes, dear?

DAUGHTER

Doesn't this room seem unusually tidy to you for a bachelor?

LADY

I hadn't noticed.

DAUGHTER

Well, do, dear!

LADY

What do you mean?

DAUGHTER

I'll bet you the earrings you promised me against the string of pearls I want that someone is living with Alik! [*Crushes cigarette in ashtray on table center.*]

LADY

What do you mean?

DAUGHTER

There's a woman here, darling.

LADY

Impossible!

DAUGHTER

[*Rises.*] A woman and Alik do seem rather ridiculous together—[*back of sofa to door*]—but just the same, perhaps it's just as well to make sure. [*She has drifted over to the door leading to* SUSI'S *room and has gone in. She comes out in a moment, with some lingerie behind her back.*] Mother, dearest! Do you think these are his, dear? [*Shows them.*]

LADY

For heaven's sake! [DAUGHTER *throws them on sofa, goes to chair right, faces front, drums on chair.*] Put that back! I don't think you should have gone in there!

People in our set don't inspect strange houses. Put them back! Someone may come in in a minute.

DAUGHTER

Don't you think we'd better go now!

LADY

Not until I'm sure. [*She rings the bell.*] We mustn't jump to conclusions, Lilli.

[*The* SERVANT *comes in.*]

LADY

Why didn't you tell us that Mr. Vilim had someone staying with him?

SERVANT

I beg pardon, Madam?

LADY

Why didn't you tell us his aunt was stopping here with him?

SERVANT

Is she his aunt?

LADY

But if she isn't, who is she?

SERVANT

Will you permit me, Madam, to suggest that I am only the servant in this house!

DAUGHTER

I understand the athlete perfectly. You may go. [*He goes.*] Well, darling—isn't that enough for you? Don't you realize that the longer we stay here, the more difficult it is going to be to explain away our execrable taste in coming here. Surely his father didn't know.

LADY

Suppose there were someone here? What difference does it make? We're both women of the world, aren't we? [*Goes to couch, picks up lingerie.*] You were saying you wanted to marry a brute. Well, isn't this proof that he *is* one?

DAUGHTER

Not exactly, dear.

LADY

All this will have to be explained.

DAUGHTER

Seems to me as though it explained itself! I'm going!

[JOSEPH VILIM *enters from garden.*]

VILIM

Hello, Lilli. [*Crosses to* LADY, *kisses her hand.*] Marta, for some reason or other, I couldn't persuade Alik to come back with me.

LADY

Oh, you couldn't, eh?

DAUGHTER

Forgive me, won't you? My head's splitting. I'm going out for a bit of fresh air. [DAUGHTER *rushes out right.*]

VILIM

What's the matter with her? [*Crosses to right end of couch.*]

LADY

She's frightfully upset. We've discovered something.

VILIM

Yes?

LADY

Inadvertently, I assure you—inadvertently. The proof is here.

VILIM

What proofs? [*Sits on lingerie.*]

LADY

Something that mustn't affect our arrangements. But—

VILIM

But what?—

LADY

Joe, Joe—[*He comes, she turns him about, he puts on his glasses.*]

VILIM

[*To right of sofa, looks at* LADY.] It's not possible!

LADY

Yes. I was utterly surprised myself. Of course, this person doesn't matter. But my daughter does. She used to pretend she didn't care for Alik. [*Crosses to him.*] But you saw how she acted, didn't you? My poor Lilli! My poor Lilli! [*She rushes off after her. As* VILIM *stands looking after her in amazement, he walks to left, meditating, rings bell—the* SERVANT *enters.*]

VILIM

[*Motions* SERVANT *to come down to him.*] I am Alik's father. What's going on here?

SERVANT

Begging your pardon, sir, I earn my wages by being discreet.

VILIM

Do you? Do you realize that *I* pay your wages? Alik is keeping someone, isn't he?

SERVANT

If you care to put it that way.

VILIM

Yes. I come in from the country because he is elected a member of the Firm. I'm delighted that at last he's done something, and now I find out that he's done even

more than I bargained for. How long has this been going on?

SERVANT

Three months.

VILIM

Why did the young fool have to keep her in his own house? Hasn't he any sense or decency? [*Comes to* SERVANT.] What kind of a person is she?

SERVANT

Utterly charming.

VILIM

Of course! Of course! I don't mean that! I mean, what sort of a person is she?

SERVANT

Oh—you mean socially?

VILIM

Yes.

SERVANT

Well, at least she has a mother. She was here today.

VILIM

A mother, eh? That's the last straw!

SERVANT

A woman of parts, I assure you. Most energetic—most experienced.

VILIM

[*Back to* SERVANT.] Three months together! And her mother comes! The jackass, has she any cousins? The whole thing's a trap! I'm just in time to prevent this. [*Turns back to table.*] I can imagine the sort of things that go on here. Parties every night, eh? All sorts of disreputable people? [*Sits chair left of table.*] It's just as well I spent a night on the train. I'll put a stop to these orgies!

SERVANT

Orgies, sir? The only people that ever call are Director Bezchyba—

VILIM

What?

SERVANT

—and Counselor Andrejs.

VILIM

You mean to say they bother with Alik? He's certainly come up in the world!

SERVANT

If you will permit me, sir—I doubt if their coming is entirely due to him.

VILIM

Is she as charming as all that? Well, if he had to do this sort of thing, why did he have to do it here? There's bound to be a scandal.

SERVANT

I don't think so, sir. They live as quiet as two reticent mice.

VILIM

Oh! What's her profession besides—

SERVANT

I beg your pardon, sir?

VILIM

I mean, what did she do before she came here?

SERVANT

I believe she earned her living, sir. The rumor is she worked in a chocolate factory.

VILIM

You're a socialist, aren't you?

SERVANT

Not entirely yet, sir. But the inevitable tendency of the age seems to lie in that direction.

VILIM

I see. . . . The lady's from a chocolate factory—the servant's a socialist. Obviously this is a father's job. [*Rises.*]

SERVANT

Obviously, sir. And as a father you will of course know how to handle the situation.

VILIM

[*Crosses to* SERVANT.] Quite! What would you advise me to say to her?

SERVANT

If you will permit me, sir, I would suggest that the best thing to do, might be to begin by apologizing for your intrusion.

VILIM

My intrusion!

SERVANT

Yes, or there's a better way—

VILIM

Yes?

SERVANT

Yes, the shortest way out is the way you came in across the garden. [*Noise of people heard offstage, from the garden.*] Or would you prefer to go this way?

VILIM

I've no intention of leaving now.

[SERVANT *goes. The ladies enter first, look very much astonished at the stranger standing in the middle of the room. They are followed by* BEZCHYBA *and* ANDREJS. *They do not see* VILIM.]

ANDREJS

It's sure to be a great success—

SUSI

Of course, Counselor, Mother knows everything.

MRS. PESTA

Of course, my dear.

BEZCHYBA

You were quite right, Mrs. Pesta, to make him sign twice.

BEZCHYBA

[*Sees* VILIM.] For God's sake what brings you here?

VILIM

[*Bowing.*] Director, Counselor!

BEZCHYBA

You don't mean to say Alik invited you to come?

VILIM

No.

ANDREJS

I'd be rather surprised if he had.

VILIM

Is there any reason why I shouldn't come to my own son's home for luncheon?

ANDREJS

No, I suppose not. But as for me, I have three sons, and I've never been tactless enough to drop in at their bachelor quarters without an invitation.

VILIM

[*To* SUSI.] I am Alik's father.

SUSI

Oh, then I imagine you want to talk to me.

VILIM

Yes.

SUSI

Of course. Mother, this gentleman wishes to talk to me.

BEZCHYBA

[*As* MRS. PESTA *goes, takes* SUSI'S *hands.*] If you need me, Susi, you know where you can reach me.

SUSI

Thank you, Director.

ANDREJS

[*To* VILIM.] Remember, go slow. [*To* SUSI.] She'll be all he'll ever amount to.

SUSI

Really, my friend, you mustn't speak that way of him.

ANDREJS

Very well, Susi, I won't if you don't want me to. You know where to reach me too, if you need me.

SUSI

Thank you. [*He leaves.* SUSI *to* VILIM.] Won't you sit down?

VILIM

[*Crosses upstage left center.*] This isn't going to be any too easy for me.

SUSI

[*Motions* VILIM *down and sits on sofa. He doesn't come.*] No, I know it isn't.

VILIM

[*Up to her.*] My old friends have such a high opinion of you.

SUSI

Possibly I don't deserve it.

VILIM

I won't say that. But even if you did—well—you see—

SUSI

Yes, I see. I am going to say what you hesitate to say. You want me to go away, don't you?

VILIM

Yes—but—

SUSI

Yes. I understand. What you want to do is to arrange it so that I will leave with a smile on my lips, don't you?

VILIM

Well, it would be better that way, wouldn't it?

SUSI

You want to retain your friends' respect, don't you, by treating me respectably?

VILIM

You've said it even better than I could say it. [*Slight bow.*]

SUSI

And I suppose you think that perhaps—shall we say twenty thousand?

VILIM

You see right into my mind, don't you?

SUSI

Yes. I've learned from Alik exactly what the Firm could afford in order to avoid an embarrassing situation. You see, I know a good deal about the Firm . . .

VILIM

You do?

SUSI

I've been helping Alik—and, don't misunderstand me—he's been helping me.

VILIM

I am beginning to appreciate their admiration for you. [*Slight bow.*]

SUSI

How kind of you, Mr. Vilim.

VILIM

Then we understand each other, don't we.

SUSI

Do we? I'm not quite sure, yet.

VILIM

But *I* am.

SUSI

Are you?

VILIM

Yes. [*Sits on chair, left of table.*] Of course, you'll go.

SUSI

Will I?

VILIM

Oh! Then you *are* a business woman.

SUSI

Yes, among other things.

VILIM

I see, it's strictly a question of business, isn't it?

SUSI

Is it?

VILIM

As you wish. Yes, we'll make it forty thousand—

SUSI

Mr. Vilim, you seem to forget that I am very fond of your son!

VILIM

Fonder than forty thousand?

SUSI

I don't know that you would understand *how* fond, if I tried to tell you.

VILIM

I know, I know you're fond of him, my dear.

SUSI

How could I help being? No one in the world has ever treated me as he has.

VILIM

No, I suppose not.

SUSI

From the very first day I saw him, in the cellar—

VILIM

Cellar!

SUSI

—but perhaps you've heard?

VILIM

Never mind the picturesque details. Spare me those.

SUSI

Why should I? You're not sparing me anything, are you? [*Looks away, then back.*] I don't think anybody in the world has the right to do what you are trying to do!

VILIM

Perhaps you don't see it as I do. But I happen to be his father!

SUSI

No! Not even his father! We're happy together, really happy. How often do you think that happens in life? Not often enough for anyone to dare to try and spoil it. [VILIM *smiles.*] I know what you think it all is.

VILIM

Well, we won't go in to that.

SUSI

Won't we? Well, it doesn't make any difference what you think it is for I'm going to fight for him with everything that's in me!

VILIM

Oh, I see! You want me to raise the bid, don't you?

SUSI

Ah! My dear Alik's your son, and you still imagine that's all it means?

VILIM

[*He is becoming angry now.*] I'm trying to handle this as delicately as I can!

SUSI

As you can. Yes, I see!

VILIM

Yes, but if it can't be managed this way, there is a way it *can* be managed.

SUSI

Is there?

VILIM

Perhaps you don't realize that the entire situation is actually in my hands.

SUSI

Is it?

VILIM

I am what I believe *you* would call the boss around here.

SUSI

Are you?

VILIM

Yes. Do you realize that these charming bachelor quarters of his are really mine?

SUSI

No! All this is Alik's—Alik's and mine!

VILIM

[*Rises, to her.*] And who pays Alik so he can pay for it? I do—I do—pardon me for losing my temper.

SUSI

That's quite all right. But, Mr. Vilim, you seem to forget that he earns it.

VILIM

Earns it? You seem to be a sensible little person. Come now, aren't you over-appreciating my son? Earns it! If he got what he earned, he wouldn't be getting a tenth of what the Firm pays him. Don't be ridiculous! [*Sits.*] Don't you realize that he gets his salary because he is *my* son and a member of the family? If you force me to be brutally frank, what it amounts to is this:—he's keeping you here on *my* money—in a house *I* am paying for.

SUSI

I understand, pardon me, won't you? [*Going to the door of her room.*] Mother!

MRS. PESTA

[*Off stage.*] Yes, darling.

SUSI

Take off that waist, and put the umbrella back in the closet! Put everything back! We're leaving, Mother.

VILIM

[*Rises.*] Don't you think it might be just as well to avoid the heroics?

SUSI

I'm going to.

VILIM

Try to be as practical as I am.

SUSI

I will be.

VILIM

I assure you, my second offer holds—the third, if necessary.

SUSI

[*She goes to the desk and takes out a notebook.*] I'm afraid I didn't hear any of them, Mr. Vilim. Here is a memorandum of everything that Alik has bought for me. You will want to check it over, of course, being a business man. The only things I am going to take that are really my own are these—the letters that he has written me.

VILIM

Of course, if you force me, I could make it fifty thousand. But that, of course, means that you leave those behind you. That's as far as I am going.

SUSI

[*Back to table, leaning against it.*] Is it? Well, read one. [*She holds out her hand, he his, he goes to her. She hands a letter to him. She slowly breaks into tears.*]

VILIM

[*Reading.*] "Susi dear, my dear, dear Susi—How can I stay here at the office. But I will, because you have told me that I mustn't come home earlier than the poorest clerk. But if you don't want me to come, send a little drink of love to a man dying of thirst in this desert here. Your Lambkin."

SUSI

Did you ever think he could write like that?

VILIM

No. To tell you the truth, I didn't.

SUSI

[*High, to conceal emotion.*] And they're all signed "Lambkin," and they're all typed. So you see, your Excellency, they're hardly worth fifty thousand. Are they? So I'm going to keep them. [*Takes it back. And then, with a tinge of bitter irony.*] I may, mayn't I?

VILIM

I'm sorry. Genuinely sorry. But after all I am Alik's father. [*Puts out his hand.*]

SUSI

[*She walks past his hand, without seeing it. Calling into room.*] Hurry, Mother! [*Puts on hat, carries coat.*]

MRS. PESTA

[*Off stage.*] Are you through, dearie?

SUSI

This gentleman and I have said all that we're going to to each other.

[MRS. PESTA *exits through hall.* SUSI *goes towards hall.*]

VILIM

Haven't you anything to say now that you're leaving Alik?

SUSI

[*Turns at door.*] Why, I'm not leaving Alik. I'm only leaving *your* house!

CURTAIN

# *Act Three*

## *ACT THREE*

SCENE: *Interior of Prague's Model Dairy. Entrance into street in upstage wall, left side. The wall comes downstage at an angle then turns and goes left parallel to the footlights. Door into the yard upstage left, door into the house extreme left. On wall right is a long shelf with milk bottles, stands with more milk bottles and fruit on them, sterilizer, on the upstage shelf a cow, two bowls of flowers, and another stand. In the right wall is an ice box, open. A few feet left of right wall is a long counter with glasses, creams, bowls, milk jugs, spoons and forks, rolls etc. Table with two chairs downstage right with a plate and glass on it. Table with two chairs center with a plate of vanilla wafers on it, table with two chairs upstage center. At the corner of the wall left is a screen, and downstage of it large armchair. Small table with sewing on it left of chair, couch downstage and left of chair. Coat rack extreme left, also coat stand left of door into street. At rise of curtain a medical student is seated left of table downstage right, reading and drinking milk, Alik is behind counter waiting on servant girl.* PESTA *in a wheelchair downstage left.*

STUDENT

Another milk, please.

ALIK

[*Bringing milk.*] The milk is especially—

GIRL

And two pounds of butter.

ALIK

[*Back behind counter.*] Two pounds of butter—

GIRL

And four litres of milk.

ALIK

Two litres of milk.

PESTA

Four litres, Alik.

ALIK

Oh! Four—

GIRL

Six biscuits. Better make that five litres of milk. And I want the same kind of butter I had last Tuesday.

ALIK

Yes, Miss, we always have the same butter that we had last Tuesday.

GIRL

The Missus says it's the best in Prague.

ALIK

Of course, Miss. Anything else, Miss?

STUDENT

Another milk, please.

GIRL

And two dozen eggs.

ALIK

[*Bringing milk.*] Two dozen eggs.

GIRL

And if the Missus wants anything else, I'll telephone. Good afternoon. Good afternoon. [*Flirting with* ALIK. GIRL *exits.*]

ALIK

Good afternoon.

PESTA

Good afternoon, Miss.

STUDENT

What do I owe you, please?

ALIK

Six kronen—

PESTA

[*Whispering.*] Doctor.

ALIK

Doctor.

STUDENT

Excellent cream. [*Pays him.*]

PESTA

Best in Prague, sir, best in Prague.

STUDENT

Good afternoon. Good afternoon, Mr. Pesta, how's your gout?

PESTA

Still got it, Doctor, still got it, good afternoon.

[STUDENT *exits.*]

MRS. PESTA

[*Comes tearing in.* ALIK *goes on with his work. He points to the saucers.*] It's time they brought the milk. If the cows are on time, why can't the milkmen be? Has the ice come? [ALIK *nods.*] Did you water the flowers? [*He nods again.*] Yes, you're getting used to it and things are beginning to shine as they ought to. No dawdling and no dust! It's up to you! [*She goes over to him.*] The cleaner it gets, the cleaner it's going to be!

PESTA

Ah, we know, we know—

MRS. PESTA

[*To* PESTA.] Yes, and that includes you, too! From now on, I'm going to shave you twice a week! [PESTA *groans. She goes over to* ALIK, *who is working hard already.*] Get busy! Get busy! Where's your elbow-grease? You ought to be able to see yourself in 'em! [ALIK *takes up the rag.*] Come on, now! You ain't washin' a baby!

I'll show you! [*She grabs the plate, spits on it, and begins polishing it.*] There you are! That's how! Well, is that a shine or ain't it? [ALIK *nods.*] And none of that with me! When you open your jaw, a sound's got to come out. I ain't Susi! I can't smell what you mean. Well, is that polish or ain't it?

ALIK

Um-hm.

MRS. PESTA

[*To* PESTA.] There! You see what a lot he can say when he wants to! [PESTA *begins to moan,* ALIK *back of counter.* ALIK *goes on with his work. She goes over to* PESTA.] Say, what's the matter with you? You look a little green under the gills.

PESTA

Well, why shouldn't I? Wasn't I born in the lap of sickness?

MRS. PESTA

[PESTA *murmurs through this.*] You're goin' to be sicker if you don't look out! The trouble with you is you're tryin' to stuff your stomach with all the food you've never had. You got to fast for the next two days!

PESTA

[*Groaning again.*] I don't want to be no skinny saint,

like in the pictures in the Teynkirche. Do you want to have a corpse on your hands? I ain't had a thing since lunch.

MRS. PESTA

All right. Give him a glass of milk, Grade C. [*She goes off left.*]

[ALIK *is about to get him the milk, behind counter.*]

PESTA

Psst! Pssst!—Say, sonnie! [*Starts to center.*] Come over here, I don't wanta be yellin'! The kind of milk I like's in that bottle on the bottom shelf behind the counter. [PESTA *quick to counter, talking to* ALIK, *over counter.*] Take it easy, take it easy, don't spill it. Everything's all right. She's pretty slick, she is. She just went out so as to give me a chance to take a nip. She doesn't like to see me at it but she brought it to me herself. She made believe it was my birthday yesterday. [*Chuckles.*] She did the same thing last month. [*Chuckles.*] God bless her—the old devil! Have a drop, son? [ALIK *looks up in surprise.* PESTA *laughs.*] And get used to it. You'll be needin' it one of these days. You can't expect to be a happy father and sober at the same time. There, now—there's a twinge again. [*Drains the glass, then takes another drop,* ALIK *takes glass, puts it on counter.* PESTA *wheels himself to the left.*] There, now. Put 'em back. That's it, son. And remember, one thing, Alik.

ALIK

Yes?

PESTA

No matter how many dairies you're goin' to have, there's always got to be a nook in each of 'em where I can hide my sustenance.

VOICE

[*Offstage.*] Milk—milk—milk—

PESTA

[*Dropping off to sleep.*] There, run and tell the old devil that the milk's come.

ALIK

[*Calling.*] The milk's here!

[MRS. PESTA *comes in.*]

MRS. PESTA

Go out for the cans, then. [*Then she calls to* SUSI.] Susi! Come on in and help carry the cans!

SUSI

[*From offstage.*] All right, Mother.

ALIK

[*When* SUSI *enters,* ALIK *makes a gesture, suggesting that* SUSI *is not strong enough to carry the can.*] But?—

MRS. PESTA

Nonsense! It ain't goin' to hurt her. Ain't I her mother? Don't I know that the best part of Susi is the

work I did at the washtubs when she was coming? [SUSI *and* ALIK *go out and return a few seconds later with a large milk-can, putting it by the counter.*] That's it, darling . . . [*To* ALIK.] Did you bring in the butter this morning? [ALIK *nods.*] Well, then, don't stand there doin' nothing! Here! Fill the cow! [ALIK *lifts the can,* SUSI *helping him, and they pour it into the cow.*]

ALIK

[*When this is all over.*] Yes?—

MRS. PESTA

And don't stand there just saying "yes." That's all he does.

SUSI

Oh no, Mother. He was up at five, cutting the wood and making the fire and grinding the coffee. And at six, he was down on the floor, scrubbing.

MRS. PESTA

Well, it couldn't hurt the floor! Now, keep your eyes open. I've got to go out. I'm going to buy the biscuits at Krigle's in future. They're cheaper there. I'll be back soon. [*To door center.*]

PESTA

Can't I go along? I used to go out walkin' more in the old days when I couldn't walk at all.

MRS. PESTA

What do *you* want to go for?

PESTA

[*Comes center,* MRS. PESTA *meets him.*] Come here —I don't want to be yellin'!

MRS. PESTA

What?

PESTA

Oh, just to leave 'em alone for a little.

MRS. PESTA

Leaving 'em alone is bad for business. He keeps lookin' at Susi instead of the customers.

PESTA

Oh, well, take me along, anyway. It's only around the corner, ain't it? [*During the dialogue between the* PESTAS, SUSI *sets the three tables with silver and puts sugar-bowl on table.*]

MRS. PESTA

All right, then. But it ain't business, I tell you. Come on. [*She starts off towards the door.*]

SUSI

Don't you worry. We'll take care of things, Mother.

MRS. PESTA

Oh, it's easy enough for you to talk. You're all right

at the business, but I got to do the worryin'. Come on, come on, then. [*She goes out*—PESTA *slowly wheeling himself out after her.*]

PESTA

Sure, that's the trouble with gettin' on in the world. When we didn't have nothin', there was nothin' to worry about. Easy, there! Wait for me, you're going so fast I'll lose the little appetite I've got. [*He goes.*]

SUSI

[*Closes door and leans on counter.*] Don't mind Mother, dear.

ALIK

No.

SUSI

She doesn't mean half she says. You know, you don't have to get up at six unless you want to.

ALIK

But I want to.

SUSI

Do you, dear? Somehow, I can't get used to it. When I hear you fussing about with the pail in the morning, I don't believe it's you.

ALIK

But it is, Susi.

SUSI

Yes, I know, dear. But I still remember you when you

used to have breakfast in bed in your purple pajamas. [*Up to him.*] Has all this been hard, dear? [*He shakes his head.*] Now, sit down. There'll still be time for your lesson before the afternoon trade.

ALIK

But I've got so much work to do.

SUSI

Never mind, let's go over what we learned yesterday. You like it better now, don't you? Taking the trouble to talk? [*He sits waiting left of table. She stands above table.*] Well?—Let's begin. Say your lesson.

ALIK

I love you.

SUSI

[*Takes his hand.*] Yes, I know, dear. We both learned that a long while ago and we're still learning it. But I mean yesterday's lesson.

ALIK

But—

SUSI

Now, show me how you sell the servant girls milk in the morning.

ALIK

Do we have to do it, now?

SUSI

Yes. You get back of the counter. [ALIK *goes behind counter,* SUSI *goes to door.*] Come on, now, I'll be the girl. Now, what do you say?

ALIK

Good morning.

SUSI

[*Imitating fat cook.*] Good morning. I want a litre of milk, please.

ALIK

Yes, but—

SUSI

You remember what I told you. Just be friendly and nice to her.

ALIK

[*Leaning across counter, smiling at her.*] I've forgotten, Susi.

SUSI

All right, then. I'll help you. [*She goes up to counter and turns towards door, as if talking to a customer.*] "Good morning, the milk is—"

ALIK

[*Hesitatingly.*] "especially—"

SUSI

"rich—" Yes, but you've got to be quick about it. You've got to say it all at once. Now say it after me,

and as quick as you can: "The milk is especially rich this morning." [*She turns, watching him.*]

ALIK

[*Growling.*] "The milk is especially rich this morning."—Hm—

SUSI

Oh, but dear, don't look so miserable. You can't expect the girls to be coming here unless you greet them with a smile. [ALIK *smiling.*] That's it, dear. Just keep on like that and every cook in Prague will be coming to you. Now you go to the table.

ALIK

But I have all these glasses to wash.

SUSI

Never mind that. Now you go to the table. [ALIK *makes a negative gesture.*] Yes, yes, and I'll be another customer. [ALIK *goes to table right,* SUSI *goes to door.*] "Good morning." [*Comes to center.*]

ALIK

[*Brightly.*] "Good morning!"

SUSI

"Good morning. A litre of milk, please—and Grade A."

ALIK

"The milk is especially rich this morning."

SUSI

Yes, dear, I know. But you said that to the other customer.

ALIK

Yes, so I did. I forgot though.

SUSI

Of course you did. But what did I teach you to say to this customer?

ALIK

[*To counter, hands on it, very bravado.*] "Just try to get milk like this anywhere else in Prague!"

SUSI

That's right! Splendid! And then what?—

ALIK

[*In quite a different tone, coming toward her.*] Did you go back to sleep after I got out of bed?

SUSI

[*Laughing.*] Alik, for God's sake, don't say that to the customer!

ALIK

No, dear— No, Susi, I won't. Is the lesson over?

SUSI

Why? Have you had enough?

ALIK

Yes. Susi, you know you're more beautiful today, than you ever were.

SUSI

Alik, did you think things were going to turn out this way? [ALIK *looks at her, smiling.*] Yesterday when I looked up and saw you sitting there, glancing at me, I knew what you meant.

ALIK

What, dear?

SUSI

You meant to say, didn't you, that we never have any time to ourselves. Wasn't that it? [ALIK *starts to speak.*] No. Don't answer. I know, Lambkin. But by New Years, we're going to have even less time for ourselves. There's always less time for three than for two.

ALIK

[*Embrace, then speaking suddenly.*] Susi, my dearest—did you think we ever could be happier than we are? Well, we're going to be! So wonderfully happy that if I knew all the words in the world I wouldn't know how to say it.

SUSI

[*In surprise.*] Alik!

ALIK

Susi, dear, don't you know what it means? It's going to be *you* and *me* and both of us.

SUSI

Alik! Alik! Who's doing all the talking now?

ALIK

It's all I can say.

SUSI

No—no—please! Please, say some more! [*At this moment,* BEZCHYBA *and* ANDREJS *appear from right and* ALIK *sees them through the window.*]

ALIK

They come here much too often, we never have a moment to ourselves. Come on, dear. [*They go off, into the house, extreme left.*]

[BEZCHYBA *and* ANDREJS *enter.*]

BEZCHYBA

It's too early for the customers yet, but later on when the afternoon trade is here, you wouldn't be able to get a seat. [*During this speech, they put their hats and sticks on the rack.*]

ANDREJS

[*Comes down, looks off left, sees no one, raps on table. Calling.*] Service, please! Service!

BEZCHYBA

Isn't there anyone here?

ANDREJS

Don't hurry them. You know the worst of it is, I've gained twenty pounds in the last three months! [*Sits right of table, right.*]

BEZCHYBA

Yes, you have, haven't you? [*At the counter, taking a wafer.*]

ANDREJS

It's a pity she couldn't have gone into a business that's less fattening!

BEZCHYBA

Well, whatever business she had chosen, she'd have made a go of it! [*Takes another wafer at counter.*]

ANDREJS

[*Laughing.*] Yes. No one's talking of anything else these days.

BEZCHYBA

Is it any wonder they're talking?

ANDREJS

This sort of thing doesn't happen very often.

BEZCHYBA

[*Laughing.*] Yes, and Prague's making the most of it, I assure you!

ANDREJS

Prague may be enjoying it, but Joe isn't.

BEZCHYBA

No, I don't suppose he is. Well, why should he?

ANDREJS

He hasn't seen Alik, since the day he followed Susi back to—

BEZCHYBA

Back to Strahovskenadgasse.

ANDREJS

He came into town yesterday. I had a talk with him and he's taking it pretty hard.

BEZCHYBA

Is he? And Lilli?—What do you suppose will come of the whole thing?

ANDREJS

Who knows? It's so unusual.

BEZCHYBA

Why so unusual?

ANDREJS

Well, you've got to acknowledge, my friend, that the sort of love they feel for each other *is* unusual. Now, isn't it?

BEZCHYBA

[*He sits opposite* ANDREJS.] Oh, come now! Don't you think that lovers always think that they are the first who have ever loved? That is, I mean, love the way they love? Didn't you live through something pretty much like this?

ANDREJS

I may have had an adventure or two—but it never landed me in the milk business.

BEZCHYBA

But didn't you ever stand on the street corner, eagerly waiting till some little, irresistible dressmaker came along?

ANDREJS

I certainly did not!

BEZCHYBA

Maybe she was a salesgirl?

ANDREJS

[*Reminiscent.*] Well, that's better.

BEZCHYBA

[*Laughing.*] There you are! I've done *my* waiting, too!

ANDREJS

Have you?

BEZCHYBA

Of course! I've waited, too, for some one!

ANDREJS

A waitress?

BEZCHYBA

[*Across table at him.*] Oh, well, never mind what! Don't you think that Joe, in his day, has stood on a corner, too?

ANDREJS

I suppose so.

BEZCHYBA

Of course, he has! And you have—and I have—and we all have!

ANDREJS

Youth! . . . Youth! . . .

BEZCHYBA

I know! Sic transit! Youth, that's the one thing worth having longest!

MRS. PESTA

[*She enters from the street.*] Good afternoon, Gentlemen! [*To* PESTA, *who is not yet in sight.*] Come on, come on. [*In a tone used to a pet-dog. To the two men.*] Ain't you had your cream yet?

BEZCHYBA

No. No. But we didn't mind waiting.

MRS. PESTA

[*Back of their table.*] There you are! What did I say? As soon as I am out—no one to attend to business! [*She rushes behind the counter very cordial.*] The same as usual, Gentlemen?

BEZCHYBA

Yes, but first, let's shake hands!

MRS. PESTA

We can do the hand-shaking later. I'm going to give you big glasses today. This morning's cream was so good that I'm sure the cows must have been happy about it. [*She goes to cow and pours out glass of milk for each man, the cow makes a moo.*] Where's Alik, is he asleep?

PESTA

[*Who has come to center.*] Alik! We got customers. Come on in. Here, take the buns, do you expect me to be doing all the work? [*He has a basket of buns on his lap.*]

[ALIK *comes in.*]

MRS. PESTA

What are you mooning about for? The gentlemen may be friends, but they are our customers and business is business! Where's Susi? Susi, Susi, where are you?

[*She rushes off.* ALIK *stands at the table, waiting for further orders.*]

BOTH MEN

Alik, the milk!

BEZCHYBA

How are things with you, Alik? Pretty much the same? [ALIK *nods.*] You haven't spoken to your father?

[ALIK *nods "No."*]

ANDREJS

He came into town yesterday.

[ALIK *nods "Yes."*]

ANDREJS

Then you did see him?

ALIK

I saw him yesterday near the Exchange, but—

ANDREJS

But what?

[ALIK *makes a gesture as of someone getting away in a hurry.*]

BEZCHYBA

Oh? That means you sneaked around the corner, does it?



*Setting by Lee Simonson* *Photo by Vandamm*

A SCENE FROM ACT THREE

[ALIK, *smiling, nods his head "Yes."* SUSI *enters from the house.*]

ANDREJS

Hello, Susi. How are you?

SUSI

I'm splendid, Counselor.

[ALIK *takes glasses and bottle and puts them behind counter.*]

SUSI

Alik, dear, Mother wants to know whether you won't wheel Pesta out to the yard? She says he's not looking well and needs the air. I'm delighted to see you both.

[ALIK *shakes* PESTA, *who wakes.*]

ALIK

Come on, Mama Pesta says I'm to take you out in the yard.

PESTA

Ain't she the slick old devil? She just wants to get rid of me so I won't be disturbin' you fine folks while you're talkin' about things that don't concern me.

[ALIK *wheels him out.* SUSI *gets wafers from counter, brings to table right.*]

BEZCHYBA

[*Rises.*] How's the business going, Susi?

SUSI

Nothing to complain of.

ANDREJS

And we stockholders are pretty well satisfied, too.

BEZCHYBA

[*Handing her a package.*] Here's something for you, Susi. You mustn't refuse it.

SUSI

But what is it?

BEZCHYBA

It isn't really for you. [*As she is opening the bundle,* ALIK *returns. She takes out some lace.*]

BEZCHYBA

I'm pretty far ahead of time, but do babies still wear that sort of thing?

SUSI

You *are* a darling! [*As she offers him her hand, he takes her is his arms and kisses her, as she puts lace on table.*]

ALIK

[*From yard door, leaping forward energetically.*] Look here, now! None of that!

ANDREJS

What's the matter?

ALIK

He's always looking for excuses to kiss Susi.

BEZCHYBA

Hm!—Am I? Say, look here, son! You're becoming an orator!

SUSI

Yes! Isn't he?

BEZCHYBA

Do you mind, Susi?

SUSI

No, my friend.

BEZCHYBA

[SUSI *is still in his arms.*] Then, everything's all right? Control yourself, my boy! [*He kisses her again.*] You've both got to allow it when you know that I don't begrudge either of you even the tiniest atom of your love.

ALIK

Well—all right.

SUSI

You were an old darling to bring that lace. Really, you were! [*She kisses him, teasing* ALIK.]

ANDREJS

Well, Bezchyba, under the circumstances, you can pay

the bill. I'm going over to the Firm, Joe must have forgotten he was to meet me here. [*Takes hat and coat from rack, and as he leaves, he meets* LILLI *coming in.*]

LILLI

How do you do, Counselor?

ANDREJS

[*Kisses her hand.*] Splendid. And you—? You must forgive me, won't you? I was just leaving. [*He exits.*]

[ALIK *crosses* LILLI, *cutting her dead, to counter.* LILLI *notices his manner, pays no attention, recognizes* DIRECTOR BEZCHYBA.]

LILLI

How do you do, Director?

SUSI

Will you sit here, Miss? [*Indicating chair, right of table, right.* LILLI *purposely sits to left of table, right.*]

LILLI

Some whipped cream, please, Miss.

SUSI

Certainly, Miss. [*She is about to get the cream, but* ALIK *intercepts her and brings it himself.* SUSI, *right of counter, comes to stage center.*]

LILLI

[*To* SUSI.] And some vanilla wafers, please. [ALIK *takes the wafers from* SUSI; BEZCHYBA *takes them from* ALIK *and hands them to* LILLI. BEZCHYBA *sits right of table.*] Thanks, Director. I wonder, could I trouble you for a little sugar?

[SUSI *is about to get it from the table right, but* ALIK *puts it on the table instead.*]

ALIK

I'll serve our customer, Susi. I've learned how. [*He makes a sign to* SUSI *to go off. He stands back of table, right.* SUSI *goes.*]

LILLI

"Miss" was the proper thing to call her, wasn't it?

BEZCHYBA

The question of the title seems to worry you, but I assure you, she has never given it a thought.

LILLI

[*To* ALIK.] You look charming in that apron.

ALIK

Do I? [*He pours a spoonful of sugar on cream.*]

LILLI

In fact the whole thing is beginning to interest me now that I know you're strong enough to handle a milk

can. [*The men exchange glances.*] Alik, I hear you've learned to talk a little.

BEZCHYBA

Yes, yes, he has.

LILLI

Have you nothing to say to me? [ALIK *is silent.*] Oh, very well, then. Give me another portion of this whipped cream. It's really excellent. [ALIK *goes back of counter,* LILLI *calls him back.*] Alik!

ALIK

Yes, Lilli. [*Comes down right of* BEZCHYBA, *with cream.*]

LILLI

Alik, you remember in the old days my reputation for brutal frankness? I assure you that things can be as they were between us when you acknowledge that this ridiculous liaison is beginning to tire you a bit. Life's such a bore, we've got to take our holidays. But, sooner or later, the holidays come to an ending, don't they?

BEZCHYBA

Lilli, may I suggest that if you think you are being either tactful or polite, you are not succeeding! [*Hands her another wafer.*]

LILLI

But at least I am trying, Director. Obviously, I should be more sensitive and sentimental about it, but

I am what I am. [ALIK *has brought the plate of whipped cream to the table, and puts it down.*] So there you are. [*She gestures with her hand and puts her sleeve in the whipped cream.*] Oh, do be careful! You're still a bit clumsy, aren't you? [*Without thinking, she takes a bit of the lace* BEZCHYBA *has brought, to wipe away the cream.*]

ALIK

Please—

LILLI

What's this?

BEZCHYBA

Tell me, do they still trim babies' dresses with lace?

LILLI

Oh—? So, our young dairyman is even more enthusiastic than I thought he was? It will be less easy, but I suppose I'll have to forgive you this, too! [*Drops lace on table.*]

ALIK

Will you have another whipped cream—or the check?

BEZCHYBA

Charge all of it to me. I think we've all had enough.

LILLI

But I'd like some more! Mayn't I have it? I can afford several portions, you know, Alik!

ALIK

Yes, I know, you can.

LILLI

And what does that mean?

ALIK

It means that perhaps you will receive politer service elsewhere.

[MRS. PESTA *comes in to overhear this, in front of chair right of table, center.* ALIK *is back of counter.*]

MRS. PESTA

What's that? Is that the way to talk to a customer?

LILLI

Well, I don't think it is. I was asking him for another whipped cream.

MRS. PESTA

Of course, you were. And I don't blame you! It's the best in Prague. You've got to forgive that fool, Miss.

LILLI

I'm going to try to.

MRS. PESTA

Sure, you are! Excuse me, Miss, but ain't I seen you some place before?

LILLI

I hardly think so.

MRS. PESTA

Well, maybe not. There are more people comin' into the store every day. But you remind me of someone. Aw, well, we won't mind that. The cream, Alik! [*She is about to get it,* ALIK *crosses back of her to counter.*]

LILLI

No, thanks. I think I've changed my mind. My bill, please.

MRS. PESTA

As the lady wishes. [*Up to right end of counter.*]

BEZCHYBA

Yes, I think the best thing would be to settle the account.

LILLI

Yes, I'm going to. And no matter what the bill is!

MRS. PESTA

But we don't overcharge you, Miss.

[ALIK *gives check to* MRS. PESTA, *and comes down right.* MRS. PESTA *comes to back of table.*]

LILLI

Alik! [*To* MRS. PESTA.] I'd like to speak to the waiter if I might.

MRS. PESTA

Alik! Come over here, what are you mooning about for? The lady wants to talk to you.

LILLI

And I think I'll be rather a good sport about it, too, Alik, I told you I was willing to forgive you everything. Yes—even the bastard.

MRS. PESTA

What's this? Say—look here! Even if you are a customer, that's no reason that I am going to let you talk about my daughter that way!

LILLI

Was I referring to your daughter?

MRS. PESTA

Well, you'd better not! How can she help the way her father treated me?

LILLI

I'm sure I'm not interested in your family history.

MRS. PESTA

Well, I ain't myself much, any more. It's long over and I've got Susi, and all he's got is the finest mausoleum in the Wolschan Cemetery.

LILLI

Director, Mother would be so hurt if she heard this. She always insists that father's is the loveliest there.

MRS. PESTA

[*Scrutinizing her rather carefully.*] Has your father's a gold fence around it?

LILLI

Well, Mother's having it repaired and it's going to look like gold by the time she's back from Wiesbaden.

MRS. PESTA

And is there a weeping lady?

LILLI

Of what possible interest can it be to you?

MRS. PESTA

None! Two kronen, if you please, Miss.

LILLI

[*Rises, puts money on table, goes to chair left of table, near door.* BEZCHYBA *also rises.*] I meant what I said, Alik.

ALIK

[*With a smile.*] Did you?

LILLI

Yes. Are you coming, Director?

BEZCHYBA

No, if you will forgive me. I think I need another glass of milk.

LILLI

[*At door.*] Doubtless Mother could have said all I've said, much more eloquently—

BEZCHYBA

Doubtless. [*Sits.*]

LILLI

[*Continuing.*]—but I've said enough, Alik, haven't I?

[BEZCHYBA *remains seated*—LILLI *goes.*]

MRS. PESTA

If I wanted to, I could have said something to her that would have turned her sourer than last week's milk. But if she ever comes back, Alik—

ALIK

Yes—

BEZCHYBA

I don't imagine she's apt to.

MRS. PESTA

But if she does, you got to treat her like a customer and keep on smilin'—even though you'd rather spit in her eye.

BEZCHYBA

I think ten kronen will about pay for my day's nourishment?

MRS. PESTA

Now, wait a minute! Let me think—[*She begins counting the empty glasses.*] eight, your Excellency, eight.

BEZCHYBA

[*Rises.*] Well, here's ten. Mr. Waiter, keep the change. [MRS. PESTA *goes to counter.* ALIK *salutes.*] I'm proud of you, my boy! You've won the first skirmish, hands down. [*Crosses and gets his hat from the rack.*]

MRS. PESTA

See you tomorrow, won't we?

BEZCHYBA

[*From the door.*] Every tomorrow. Good afternoon. [*Exit.*]

[ALIK *sits on table, near door.*]

MRS. PESTA

[*Coming down to him.*] Tables are no place to sit on. Well?

ALIK

Well?

MRS. PESTA

Well, what's the use of stirring up a corpse.

ALIK

What?

MRS. PESTA

Before the afternoon trade comes, you've got to go over to the new place with Susi and see what that cheat of a woman wants for her lease. I'll go out in the yard to the old man. God help him, he'll be talking himself into a stomach-ache. [*She goes off.*]

[ALIK *wipes off the tables that have been used. He goes thoughtfully to the table, looks at the lace, finally puts his pipe into his mouth determinedly, takes it out, puts it in again. He pulls himself together and calls into the door of* SUSI'S *room.*]

ALIK

Susi!

SUSI

Do you want anything, Lambkin? [ALIK *points to the sofa and they both sit down.*]

SUSI

What's the matter? Is it something serious?

ALIK

Yes.

SUSI

Alik, what is it?

ALIK

Things can't go on this way

SUSI

What way?

ALIK

The way they're going.

SUSI

But they're going all right, aren't they?

ALIK

Yes. But just now someone put things into ugly words.

SUSI

What words?

ALIK

"Liaison" and "woman" and—[*And then hesitating.*] "bastard."

SUSI

What?

ALIK

Yes, Susi.

SUSI

Sh!—The talk's coming home to us, isn't it, dear? Before, it was only talk. Now that the baby's coming. And we aren't married. But we could marry, if we wanted to, couldn't we?

ALIK

Yes, Susi, yes.

SUSI

No, Lambkin. We've got to go slow. We mustn't be

too sure of our house of cards. Let's leave things as they are. Do you think you could love me more if I were really your wife? [ALIK *turns his head away in embarrassment.*] No, dear. We've got to go slow, for your sake as well as mine. My dearest dear, what would happen to me if we were married and some day someone convinced you that it had been all a mistake? Do you think I could live through that day—that terrible day—when I would suddenly look up and see in your eyes that you regretted it? It would be too late, then, dear. It's best as it is. This way I am still yours, and you're still free. No, don't look like that. Please smile, Alik. And now, I know what you're going to say.

ALIK

Do you, Susi?

SUSI

Yes. You're going to say, "Come on. Let's go over and look at the new store."

ALIK

No, it wasn't that, Susi.

SUSI

Oh, yes, it was. And you know what I'm going to say.

ALIK

What, Susi?

SUSI

We're going now, so take off your apron. [*She gets his hat and coat from rack extreme left.*] Here's your

hat and coat. [*They go to the door*—SUSI *calls.*] We're going, Mother.

MRS. PESTA

[*Coming in.*] Well, hurry back! All right, the poor old fellow's fallen asleep.

SUSI

[*To* ALIK, *in doorway.*] Now when we get there, you let me do the talking. [*Laughs. By this time, she is out of sight.*] I don't suppose I had to say that, did I, dear?

[MRS. PESTA *goes to table, left of sofa, picks up sewing, opens the drawer, takes out needle and thread, sits on sofa—begins sewing and singing a lullaby at the same time.*]

MRS. PESTA

There once was a lone orphan baby
And nobody seemed to care
When his poor little belly was empty
And brambles caught in his hair.

And God Who watches the swallows
And the birth and the death of the king
Was always so awfully busy
That He seemed to forget the wee thing.

And when they buried the pauper
No mourners stood at the sod
But who is that plump little angel
Standing there smiling at God!

[VILIM *enters—looks around the dairy—sees* MRS. PESTA—*finally steps up to her.*]

VILIM

I beg your pardon.

MRS. PESTA

[*Rises.*] Sure. But you nearly scared the life out of me. Good afternoon, your Excellency.

VILIM

I had a 'phone message from Counselor Andrejs' office that I was to meet him here.

MRS. PESTA

But you're late. He's gone.

VILIM

I'm sorry to have disturbed you. You were singing, if I'm not mistaken.

MRS. PESTA

Oh, it's all right. Doesn't matter. I'm not studyin' for the op'ra. Will you have a half-and-half, sir? Best cream in Prague!

VILIM

No, I don't think so, thank you. You don't mind if I look around, do you? [*Goes to extreme right, turns upstage and back to center.*]

MRS. PESTA

No. Go as far as you like. Customers won't be coming in till their afternoon drink. That part's the dairy. This part's where the house begins.

VILIM

[*Looking about.*] It's really quite charming.

MRS. PESTA

Sure, it is nice and cosy. Nothing like it in all of Prague. Sure you won't have a cream, sir?

VILIM

No, thanks. May I sit down? [*Puts hat and stick on table, above him.*]

MRS. PESTA

Sure. But if you sit, you're a customer! This ain't a waitin' room!

VILIM

Very well, then. Just milk, please. [*Sits in chair left of table, stage center.*]

MRS. PESTA

[*Starts singing. Pours him a glass of milk from the cow.*] Two kronen, please.

[*He pays her. She goes back behind the screen and begins sewing and singing a lullaby, sitting at table, stage left.* VILIM *begins sipping the milk.*]

VILIM

Mrs. Pesta—

MRS. PESTA

Yes, your Excellency— [*Goes on singing.*]

VILIM

I—I— [MRS. PESTA *goes on singing*] do you think there is any reason why we should beat about the bush?

MRS. PESTA

It depends what's under the leaves. [*Goes on singing.*]

VILIM

Hadn't we better be direct?

MRS. PESTA

You know best, sir. [*She goes on singing.*]

VILIM

That's very pretty—but you don't seem to be listening.

MRS. PESTA

I listen to all I want to hear.

VILIM

Well, then?

MRS. PESTA

Well, then what?

VILIM

Well—the truth is—I'd be willing to forgive Alik.

MRS. PESTA

[*Rises and goes to left of* VILIM.] I wish to God you'd take him back!

VILIM

[*In amazement.*] What!

MRS. PESTA

He's a loss, a total loss! We could get a real waiter for a third of what he costs us. Would you believe it, your Excellency, he gets four hundred kronen a month and his board and lodgings, and his washin' thrown in. A flea with five feet gone, could move quicker than he does. He'd probably be worth more to Vilim and Son. He's got the kind of brains for that.

VILIM

I'd be willing to give him another chance.

MRS. PESTA

Why wouldn't you? That's the sort of business where the little fellows do the work and the big ones take the credit! But a dairy means real work!

VILIM

But don't you realize he's my only son?

MRS. PESTA

Well, what of it? Didn't your only son run away with my only daughter?

VILIM

Yes, but all the scandal—the talk! [*Turns in chair.*]

MRS. PESTA

Talk never killed no cat!

VILIM

[*Becoming more and more excited.*] I tell you, I won't be able to stand this much longer!

MRS. PESTA

[*Crosses to right of* VILIM.] Have another glass of milk—extra cold. It can't hurt you and maybe it will cool you off. [*She gets milk from counter, and gives it to him. She sits right of table.*]

VILIM

Thanks, Madam.

MRS. PESTA

Oh, it's "Madam" now, is it? Now look here, your Excellency—weighin' one litre over against another—what makes you think that I come out of this any better than you? Sooner or later, life squeezes us all through the needle's eye. There's no sense in it, no matter how you look at it. Why couldn't my dear little fool of a Susi have picked out a man who could pull along with her—not a lazy lout like your Alik. Poor, little Susi—God help her!

VILIM

You're thinking only of your daughter, aren't you?

MRS. PESTA

And ain't you thinkin' of your son?

VILIM

Yes, that's true. But he was a dear little fellow—

MRS. PESTA

They're all dear little tots till they grow to be big troubles. But somehow God keeps sending the children to keep the world goin'—and maybe He knows what He's doin'—and maybe He don't. But speakin' of children, do you know a nice lullaby, Excellency?

VILIM

What?

MRS. PESTA

The sort that will soothe them to sleep when their pants are wet and their teeth are comin'. What's the good of five yards of lace when they've got the colic?

VILIM

[*Rises, goes stage left and is walking about.*] So!—So!—

MRS. PESTA

Sure! It's so. What did you expect, sir? The only lullaby I know is about an orphan child— [*She starts singing.*]

VILIM

Quite so—quite so— [*She stops.*]

MRS. PESTA

And that would be too sad for the nice little girl that's comin'.

VILIM

Ah! So, it's to be a girl, eh?

MRS. PESTA

Well, ain't the chances even?

VILIM

[*Back to table, center.*] Why didn't you tell me this right away?

MRS. PESTA

There was no right away about it. I was thinkin' it would happen long ago.

VILIM

Ah! So this was the news that Andrejs had to tell me! This was to be the last straw, wasn't it? Aren't you proud of your daughter, Mrs. Pesta?

MRS. PESTA

Maybe *proud* ain't exactly the word, your Excellency. But don't you go blamin' her! No girl gets a baby all alone. Even if she's as smart as Susi.

VILIM

So you think that Alik and I are caught now, don't you?

MRS. PESTA

Here! Here! Go slow, now! This is a dairy, and no

police court! Ain't I tellin' you that nothin' would please me better than if you would get him off our hands. Who says my daughter's daughter needs a father? There'll be milk enough for her without your Alik!

VILIM

Why did I have to have such an ass of a son! [*Crosses to counter.*]

MRS. PESTA

Or me my Susi!

[ALIK *and* SUSI *enter.*]

SUSI

Mother, she's willing to sign tomorrow. [*She sees* VILIM *and bows formally.*]

VILIM

[*To* ALIK.] I have something very important to say to you, Alik.

[ALIK *faces him.*]

ALIK

Yes, sir.

SUSI

I guess we'd better leave them alone.

MRS. PESTA

Do you think so? Well, you're managin' this. I ain't.

[SUSI *and* MRS. PESTA *go towards door, extreme left.* MRS. PESTA *sits on the sofa.*]

SUSI

Come, Mother.

ALIK

[*Takes* SUSI's *hand and prevents her from going. With* SUSI, *he faces his father.*] Yes, Father?

VILIM

So you do realize that I am your father? [ALIK *shrugs his shoulders.*] Is a shrug the only answer to my question? What are you thinking of, you imbecile?

SUSI

Tell him what you're thinking of, Alik.

PESTA

[*Wheels himself in from the yard.*] Good afternoon, your Excellency.

ALIK

I am thinking of you and me—and—of the other you.

SUSI

I know, dear. But you've got to say something to your father.

ALIK

Very well, then. The milk is especially rich this morning.

SUSI

Oh, Alik!

ALIK

No, Susi? Oh, very well—We're having nice weather today, aren't we?

VILIM

Are we? Well, perhaps it isn't going to stay so nice. [ALIK *smiles.*] What are you smiling at?

ALIK

Am I smiling, Father?

VILIM

Are you going to marry the girl I choose for you?

ALIK

[*Smiling.*] Lilli?

VILIM

No, you damn fool! But we still might find someone willing to marry into the Firm of Vilim and Son with even more money than Marta.

ALIK

Oh—

VILIM

Now, come, you ass! Don't you realize that you're the idiotic victim of these two women?

ALIK

Possibly you have the right, as my father, to insult me the way you want to. Possibly, that's a father's duty—

but I warn you not to drag in Susi and her mother! If you keep on, you will gain nothing from this, and what you will lose is the memory that you ever had a son.

VILIM

Will you come with me?

ALIK

Certainly not! It's much nicer here with Susi.

VILIM

And how about the Firm of Vilim and Son?

ALIK

[*Gets apron from table, upstage, center and puts it on.*] And how about Prague's Model Dairy?

VILIM

I suppose you realize that though you were elected a member of the Firm, I can still get rid of you?

ALIK

I don't think that'll be necessary. I sent in my resignation today.

VILIM

What's that?

ALIK

Just that!

PESTA

Will you listen to him?

MRS. PESTA

What's he up to, Susi?

SUSI

I don't know, Mother, I don't.

ALIK

All of you have been doing the talking! Now, you've got to listen to me. My position with Vilim and Co. was nothing but a name. There I would have been nothing but a silent figure-head. Vilim and Co. with its dying traditions, would have been the end of me but Susi and the dairy and all of this is only the beginning. Yes, it's your son that's saying this, Father—your Alik. Don't you realize that the Firm is rolling downhill of its own dull momentum—and what does it matter? Let it roll! It's running down, like a nag that's tired or a watch that's broken. It's got too used to itself and its blood is stale! Let it go, Father, and end in a heap of dust.

VILIM

Yes, but—

ALIK

But here there's work to do. Work that's got to be done out loud and I'm going to do it! You see, I've learned to think for myself, Father.

VILIM

Have you—

ALIK

It surprises you, doesn't it? Well, it surprises me, too. The sort of work, Father, that you probably wouldn't understand. Like steaming out the cans, and chopping wood, and scrubbing floors, and yelling at the milkmen when they're late. Vilim and Co. would have been the end of me, but Susi is only the beginning. You'd better come to your senses, Father! I'm going to manage my own life from now on!

VILIM

Are you—

ALIK

I didn't think I could do it, but now I know I can. And though you wouldn't believe it, I am beginning to enjoy it. Yes, actually enjoy it, Father. I've begun to realize that developing my muscles is more important than having my nails manicured, that using my mind is more interesting—yes, actually more interesting—than having others use it for me. And when the firm of Vilim and Co. crashes into the ditch, in a heap of dust, the last of the Vilims won't be under the wreckage! And there's lots more I could say, too! But I've said enough, haven't I, Father? You see, I've learned to talk. And now, sir, have you anything to say?

VILIM

No! [*He goes to the door.*]

MRS. PESTA

Here! Just a minute, your Excellency! You've forgotten to ask for the bill. But under the circumstances, I imagine the Firm will stand the price of the milk!

ALIK

Susi!

SUSI

Yes, darling?

ALIK

We'll get the marriage license tomorrow, won't we, darling?

SUSI

Are you sure, Alik? Are you sure?

MRS. PESTA

Now, Susi, make him give you at least a month to think it over!

ALIK

Don't you go telling her what to do?

SUSI

Mother, you mustn't interfere!

MRS. PESTA

I tell you, you can't go marryin' him in no hurry!

ALIK

I can't, can't I?

PESTA

Aw, shut up—the lot of you! What difference does it make whether he marries her or not?

ALIK

What difference! I'll decide this and what I say goes. [*He struts across the stage, smoking his pipe.*]

MRS. PESTA

Who told you you could smoke in here?

[*All talking at once, from now until Curtain.*]

ALIK

I'll smoke in here and do anything else I want to. Do you think I'm going to be listening to you the rest of my life?

MRS. PESTA

Well, if you talk like that to me, there won't be much life left for me.

SUSI

Oh, Mama, Mama, you know he didn't mean what he said.

ALIK

I did mean it, and I'll say it again if I want to. I tell you I've heard enough from you and that's that.

PESTA

Go to it, son, go to it. [*Wheeling his chair in a circle. The others continue a violent bickering.*]

CURTAIN

PITTSBURGH PLAYHOUSE
222 CRAFT AVE.
PITTSBURGH, - PA.

